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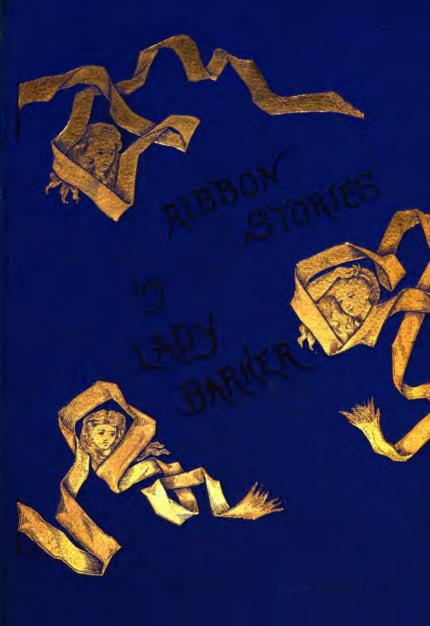
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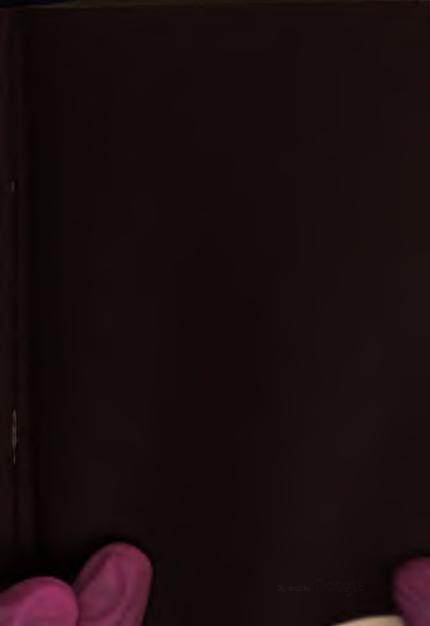
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RIBBON STORIES.





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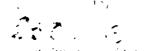
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RIBBON STORIES.

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LADY BARKER,

AUTHOR OF "STORIES ABOUT :- " "CHRISTMAS CAKE," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY C. O. MURRAY.



Nondon :

MACMILLAN AND CO.

1872.

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Bedication.

TO

ETHEL STREATFEILD,

THE REAL LITTLE

RIBBON STORY-TELLER.

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RIBBON STORIES.

INTRODUCTORY.

ETHEL lived by herself in a great lonely house. When I say by herself, I mean as far as her real, inner self was concerned, what she used to call—me, my own self. There were plenty of other people in the house; first, her papa and mamma, who were very fond of their only little girl, and next a couple of great schoolboy brothers. They were fond of her too; that is to say, they would have punched any other boy's head who tried to bully her; and they brought her the earliest birds' eggs, and made it a point of showing to her first all their most delightful

В

and messy discoveries in the garden or in the fields. But Ethel was such a curious little girl that, instead of growing rather like a boy herself. which is what often happens to the only sister in a home full of boys, she never could make herself care for what her brothers liked: ferrets. for instance, or pet snakes. She did not even enjoy going round the haystacks or into the barn with the ratcatcher, which Ralph and Oswald thought the most exciting and delightful entertainment in the world. As for the birds' eggs, she shed tears over them as soon as her brothers' backs were turned, and implored the boys not to bring her any more. Then she did not care for seeing mice turned out of the trap for the cat to catch; nor could she even be brought to see the fun of watching the tame magpie chevying a frog round the garden. This was Ralph's favourite diversion: to catch a frog and show it to the magpie. Of course the frog commenced to make tracks directly for the nearest pond, and Mag would hop after it, prodding it on with her bill. At each sharp dig the frog used to scream exactly like a young bird; and Ralph would laugh until he cried again, assuring Ethel, who was in dire distress all the time, that it was only Mag's fun, and that the frog did not mind it a bit.

In spite, however, of the little girl's tender heart, which refused to find pleasure in gratifying that careless curiosity—the real secret of a boy's cruelty—she was so unselfish and sweet-tempered, that although her brothers said "It was a pity Ethel was such a muff!" they were very fond of her, and agreed that "with it all she wasn't a bit of a coward," which they considered the highest praise they could bestow. Ethel had plenty of outdoor amusements, her pony, and a couple of square yards of garden, which was always going to be something wonderful, but generally appeared to visitors as if it had been freshly dug only that morning: her doves, rabbits,

and so forth-to say nothing of dear old Tan the Irish water-spaniel, who was exactly as old Indoors our small friend as his little mistress. was quite as well off. She had the kindest governess in the world, Miss Kirke, who made lessons a delightful and interesting kind of play, because the doctor had said one day, when Ethel had been telling him one of her stories, "the less that child learns, the better;" and she had her own dear mamma to walk with sometimes, and Papa to ride with, and Nursey was always glad to see her in her domain—empty now, but still a cheery, airy, big room, where everybody took their cut fingers, or headaches, or chilblains, or even their bad tempers. Nurse had a cure, in her head or her heart, for all these things.

Well, is it not rather odd that in spite of all I have been telling you, Ethel was a very lonely little girl? So lonely, that she used to spend hours of her time, especially in wet weather, telling herself stories—these very stories which I am going to tell you. This is the way I came to know about them.

One day I was calling on her mamma, and we were sitting in a small room opening into another and larger one, which, however, was seldom used. It was not a nice sort of day by any means, but one forgot, or at least I did, how damp and cold and nasty the weather was out of doors, as I sat by the fire with Ethel's mamma, talking about our boys. How they out grew their clothes, and wore out their boots, and tumbled into ponds, and so on; but yet were each and all the cleverest and the most delightful boys in the world, and would probably be Lord Chancellors, and Prime Ministers, and Field-Marshals, and goodness knew what, as soon as ever they grew up.

The room we were sitting in was divided from the larger one by heavy curtains, and through their folds came the muffled tones of a child's voice. I had heard the monotonous drone for some short space of time before I remarked it, and then I asked Ethel's mother what the sound was.

"Oh," said she, "it is only Ethel telling herself a ribbon story!"

You must surely know by this time that I am quite as fond of a story as any of you monkeys, so I pricked up my ears directly, and cried, "What? I never heard of such a thing!"

"I daresay you have not," said Ethel's mamma, laughing at my eagerness. "Come and look, but you must be very careful not to let her see you, or she'll stop directly. Not out of caprice or shyness; she declares that she often wants to tell me a ribbon story, but that she cannot say a word if she knows I am listening to her. She is not at all vexed, however, if anyone overhears her. She only begs that she may not know that they are listening."

These words quite removed my scruples, for otherwise I should not have been able to make

myself hear what was not intended for my ears, any more than I could open another person's letter. I suppose I still hesitated, for the little girl's mother got up from her sofa, and went softly to the curtain, opening its folds the least bit in the world, and beckoning me to come and peep too. This is what I saw.

A great, gaunt, half-furnished room, drab in colour and dismal in general appearance; prim, too, with the horrible, housemaid tidiness of an unused sitting-room. The blinds were down, and there was no fire, and not much light. But in the clear space in the middle of the dreary room a bright little figure made a glow of life, and warmth, and colour wherever she flitted, for she was never still for one moment. I have only to lay down my pen and think, to bring it all distinctly before me. I see a tall, slender girl, about eight or nine years old, who is slim without being thin, and singularly graceful. She has on a simple frock of crimson serge, with a pretty little

bodice and apron of white muslin. Her fair hair curls in short thick rings all over her little head, and from my hiding-place whenever she turns towards me I can see a pair of big brown eyes shining and sparkling through the dull gloom. I am sorry to notice, however, that the little face is pale, and the red lips are very tremulous, for she is approaching a terrible catastrophe in her story, and it is all far too real to the little romancer.

But the strangest thing I saw was a long piece of bright blue ribbon, about a couple of inches wide, in the child's hands, which she ceaselessly moved backwards and forwards. Sometimes she waved it like a streamer; again she would wind it round her neck and waist as if it were a scarf; but oftenest she danced about, slipping it through her fingers as if she were "paying it out," as sailors say of a rope or cable. All the time her feet were moving as well as her nimble hands, and I could not help being struck by their ex-

pressive gestures. Now all is hurry and confusion in the rapid patter; again it is easy to guess that those light, airy bounds mean joy and triumph; whilst sorrow and perplexity are expressed by faltering and uncertain steps.

It was plain that the child had no notion of display or affectation. All was a simple, literal outpouring of her inmost heart and mind; and as such I am going to try, as exactly as I can, to reproduce some of the stories Ethel told herself in this way. I often had opportunities of listening to her without her knowing that I was doing so; but I made it a point of honour to my own conscience to say afterwards, "Ethel, I heard you telling a ribbon story to-day."

"Did you?" she would answer, without the least shyness or embarrassment. "Wasn't it horrid?" or else, "It was a very sad one to-day," or "Isn't Joe a funny boy? he does make me laugh so." Joe being one of her ribbon characters, and as real as Ralph or Oswald to

her. But the curious part of the performance was the little maid's firm belief that the stories came out of the ribbons. I have known her run to her mother with a doleful face and a piece of new blue ribbon in her hands, complaining, "Oh, Mamma, this is such a stupid ribbon! It has no stories in it. I have tried it with all sorts of things, and it will not say a word. Will you give me another bit, please?"

Sometimes she had two or three lengths cut off before she could find one to please her. The real secret of course lay in her sense of touch, which was as acute and delicate as that of a blind person. A corded ribbon was her deepest aversion. "It goes so slow, and is so clumsy," she cried impatiently; whilst satin "went too fast, and talked nonsense;" but a nice thick and yet soft piece of silk ribbon, without any edge to check the rapid play of the little fingers, was just the thing, and "full of stories."

Beyond a dim, general impr ssion of the plot

of the tale, the child could not be brought to recollect the details which gave to her hidden hearers such a vivid idea of how real this world of stories was to their little teller, and I used often to repeat them to her in the hope that she would correct me if I had made a mistake; but to my disappointment Ethel would listen to my story as if it were new, clapping her hands and laughing, or looking sad and downcast as the tale varied from gay to grave. Sometimes she carried her impertinence so far as to beg me to tell her an old "ribbon story;" but this request I indignantly refused, and it came at last to be regarded as a challenge for a game of romps.

So although Ethel has heard all these stories repeated back again to her, they will probably seem as new to her as they will to you, and I hope she will not be ashamed of them. We have agreed between us, that whatever shortcomings they may be found to possess, the blame

is to be equally divided between her and me for not telling it properly; for "it could not have been the ribbon's fault," says Ethel most emphatically.

CHAPTER I.

ELLA'S DREAM.

ELLA was a little girl as big as me. She was a very pretty little thing, but oh so "'quisitive!" All day long she used to ask her mamma and her Miss Kirke questions about everything; and even at night she dropped to sleep asking Nurse, "But what becomes of Ella when her eyes are shut? How is it that she sees all the same, and even better than when her eyes are open? Has she another pair of night-eyes like the owls, Nursey dear; or how is it?" Luckily Miss Ella had shut her eyes and gone off sound asleep before Nurse could think of anything to say. Indeed, the great comfort with this little girl was that

she asked so many questions about everything, that if you were not in a hurry, and pretended to be thinking of something to answer, she would be quite sure to fly off to another question, and then before that was answered, to another; and so on all day long.

Strangers and visitors used to say, when Ella inquired what made their watches tick, or if their gowns had come off a sheep's back, or out of a worm's mouth, "Dear me, what a clever, intelligent little girl!" and they would politely explain to her, so far as they knew themselves, how everything she asked about was made; but they soon found that it was not of much use. Before one question was half answered, Ella's mind had flown off to something else, and she did not listen or try to understand what the kind person was taking so much trouble to explain, so her mamma's friends soon gave her up in despair, and only said, "We are going to see Mrs. So and So. I do hope that horrid, tiresome

little Ella won't be there; she does nothing but ask questions."

Now you must know. Ethel, that there are a lot of curious little creatures, something like fairies. but even slighter and prettier than fairies, always hovering about us. Don't you know when the sun comes in through these funny windows in the hall, what beautiful things you can see on the wall? Blue, and pink, and purple, and gold? thinks it has something to do with the coloured glass; but why aren't they always there, then? The glass is always there. No, I'm nearly quite sure they are bits of my fairies' frocks. Just little bits, you know; and don't you remember how they jump about? that's because they are dancing like this. Then again, I am quite, quite certain that a very clever, wise fairy lives inside me, just here, who knows exactly when I've been good and when I've been naughty; and she is very particular, and does lead me such a life until she gets her own way. Mamma says it's my

con—conscience; but I don't think it can be a part of me, it seems so like another person. Well, we'll settle it is a fairy, or at least not quite a fairy—I am tired of fairies, they are really so common—a sylph. I heard somebody say I was a little sylph, and I asked Miss Kirke and she told me; but that gentleman must have been making fun of me, or else he did not know what a sylph was, for they are not so big as my little finger, and so thin that you can see right through them. I think they must be nearly as pretty as soap-bubbles.

Well, these sylphs and things were worried to death by Ella, for they get blown about by people's breath, and Ella was always saying "Oh!" and making a sort of gale of wind in the room, by rushing here and there, asking questions. Never still a moment was she—and so idle! If she would have had patience, her Miss Kirke said, to sit down and read in books, she would have found out all about everything she wanted

to know in time, but she would not take any trouble herself—oh dear no!

At last the sylphs could bear it no longer, and after Ella had gone to bed they held a meeting; that's what papa says people do when they have a grievance. Well, the sylphs had a huge grievance, and they came and had a meeting here in this very room, when we were all fast, fast asleep, Ella and all. There were such a lot of them; but the worst of it was they were so weak and so small that they could not do much. It was proposed to pinch her, but although ten thousand of the brayest and strongest sylphs were ordered to pinch all at once, they said they felt sadly afraid she would not mind it, or be hurt a bit. They tried on a bud of that fuchsia there, growing in a big pot, but they could not pop it, though they jumped on it and squeezed it for ever so long. The sylph-king grew very angry, and said somebody must really find out a way of punishing Ella, or else he'd put it in the housemaid's head

to open all the windows at once, and blow them right away altogether. The sylphs were terribly frightened when they heard this, and some of them, not to be losing time, flew upstairs to Ella's room, and walked up and down inside her nose, and others tugged away at a few loose hairs which had escaped out of her net, but they did not do any good at all, only harm indeed, for they woke her up, and then she sneezed, and called to her nurse, and wanted to know why she had woke up, and where she had been, and so on. But after Nurse had said, "In dreamland, my dear," luckily she went off to sleep, and the sylphs went downstairs again very softly, and didn't sav a word to anybody about what a mess they had made of trying to wake up the little girl. would soon be morning, when the servants would be opening doors and windows, and sweeping and dusting the sylphs out of all their pet hidingplaces, and no one had thought of any way of punishing Ella. At last a wee, wee sylph came

flitting down the chimney. Perhaps that was what made her so black, but yet it could not have been, for I know she was not dirty. She had a black veil like Mamma's gown which shines—gauze, she calls it,—and a long black robe; both robe and veil were covered with tiny diamond dots, and these were her eyes, it turned out. Wasn't that curious? but so it was. Well, she came and made a reverence to the sylph-king, who was sitting up there exactly on the point of old Father Time's scythe, over the clock. This sort of reverence; not a curtsey, so, but two twirls and a skip, and her foot stuck out gracefully behind, up in the air, this way, while she thus addressed her sovereign:

"Please your Airiness, I'm a dream-sylph, and I can creep in where no one else can, and I'll worry the life out of that Ella before she wakes up, if you'll only say the word."

"What word?" thundered the king. No, not thundered, for he was too small—whispered the king.

"Any word you choose, my dread lord," said the dream-sylph (for she was dreadfully frightened); "any word which will signify your gracious acceptance of my poor services."

"Get along with you then," said the king more graciously, for he was pleased to think he had alarmed one of his subjects, and such a clever one too. "Get along with you, and see (you appear to have got plenty of eyes) that you cure her of that horrid habit of asking questions without caring for the answers."

"Gracious Airiness, it shall be done, if one poor sylph can do it," said the little creature in black, as she flitted up the chimney again.

I can't think how she came to know her way so well, but it is a fact that she did not make any mistakes in the fluffs, or flues, or whatever they are called, as that poor little Tom did before he turned into a Water Baby, but she came right down, straight into Miss Ella's room, where the young lady was snoring fast asleep, with her

little turned-up nose looking as if it wanted to know something or the other. People said she had an inquisitive nose; dear me, I hope my nose isn't an inquisitive one! I'll look; no. I don't think it is. Well, this dream-sylph had picked up a great many other little sylphs on the wav. all dressed in black like herself, only without all those eves, so she had to push them here and there, wherever she wanted them to go. They were crooked little things, and turned and twisted as they went in the funniest way you ever saw, but that was partly because they were so blind, you know, but it looked very odd. The dream-sylph did not lead them to Ella's nose nor to her mouth, no, not even to her eyes, as I should have thought, but she got them all upon the pillow, and drove them like a flock of sheep right into Ella's ear. She went in last herself, having first of all jumped up and down like this on Ella's eyelids just to shut them up tighter. But after a little while, she too went down that long passage leading from Ella's ear right into the very middle of her head. When she got there, she opened all her diamond eyes very wide indeed, and the crooked little creatures she had brought with her began racing up and down the passages inside Ella's head—for I heard the doctor say there were passages—and the moment they set off running, Ella began to dream. This is what she dreamt, but she had no idea she was asleep; it all seemed as if she were wide awake.

She dreamed that the morning had come, and the time to get up. She thought she was in her own pretty little room, which looked just the same as ever. Nurse lay fast asleep in her bed in one corner. "What a joke," thought Ella, "here am I awake before Nurse. I'll get up and dress myself, and play her a trick." She had a dim idea that her toilette would need to be made over again, so she did not take the trouble to get into her bath, or do any washing at all; she only began to dress. But nothing would go right;



ELLA'S DREAM.

P. 23.

first her little socks wriggled and twisted about in her hands and dropped upon the floor ever so often, and all the time she was trying to put them on, her two little shoes kept dancing about, exactly as if there were feet inside them. They did the prettiest steps you ever saw; some were like this, and then every now and then they jumped, so! At first Ella liked watching them, but she found it very troublesome to run barefooted all over the room after the tiresome, pattering things. The moment she got near them they began to sing out to her—

"Say, Ella, say—
Of what are we made?
You don't catch us to-day
Till your forfeit is paid."

"What nonsense!" cried Ella, standing on one little bare foot. "How can I tell what you're made of! I'll ask somebody as soon as I am dressed."

"Oh no, no, that won't do," cried the right shoe, tap, tapping on the floor with its toe and heel in the most provoking way. "You have asked often enough, and been told fifty times all about us, but you never listened, for you did not really want to know. So now you can't tell us, and I give you fair warning you won't catch us until you remember all about how the skin of the poor little kid is sent to the tanner, and then to the shoemaker, and all about it. Begin now."

"I won't!" screamed Ella, stamping her foot on the floor; but, oh! what a yell she gave the next moment. She had stamped on a pin—a crooked pin, too; and it began hopping all about the carpet, and going head over point exactly like the street boys.

"How am I made?" it cried. "Why am I so sharp? Who gives pins points? How do they fasten on their heads, Ella dear? Come, make haste: you were told all about us, you know, only yesterday; begin at the beginning now,

when I was only a wire. I should like to hear my own history very much indeed."

"Well, then, you won't hear it from me," said Ella, very sulkily; for she began to suspect the things were making fun of her. "I don't care about my shoes and stockings. I'll just slip on my petticoats and run across the room and wake Nurse, and she'll soon catch my shoes for me, and pick you up and throw you out of the window, you spiteful pin."

The petticoats were no easier to catch, however, than the shoes. As for her little blue flannel petticoat with its pretty scolloped edge, Ella was obliged to sit on the edge of her bed and watch that, its antics were so extraordinary. It waved here, and it waved there, like a flag. Then it dropped on the floor, and Ella perceived to her amazement—for her dream-eyes grew sharper-sighted every moment—that it was dragged about by hundreds of little crooked creatures, all exactly like those things put in a

book to show that a question is asked. Once she made a sudden dart and got her bare foot upon it, and then it wrapped itself all around her leg, and said, in a solemn muffled voice, as if some one was speaking with their head tied up in a bag.

"Tell me directly, O you intelligent child, what I am made of. How do I come to be blue? Did I grow on a sheep's back or on a goat's? Answer me that directly, or shiver all day without me."

"I'm sure I forget," sobbed Ella, for she was very cold and shivering already. "Do let me put you on, please. Nurse will be so angry if I run about like this and catch cold."

"What is a cold?" shrilled a thousand wee, wee voices, like so many sneezes all about the room. "Why do you say 'catch a cold?' You don't run after it, do you? Come, tell us all about it, there's a good girl. Aishoo! aishoo!"

"Nurse!" cried Ella, now fairly driven to despair, "get up directly: please do, Nurse dear. Everything is so dreadfully unkind, and I want you to wash and dress me."

But no Nurse answered, for you remember that the dream-sylph had jumped up and down on her eyelids too, so as to shut them up very tight, and had stopped up her ears with a little ball made of some of the other sylphs rolled up tightly together. It was rather disagreeable for them, poor things, because they had to hold on so tight to each other lest they should come to pieces, and make the dream-sylph angry; but they had to do as they were told, you know.

Well, Nurse didn't wake up, because she couldn't, and after a little bit Ella began to roar, but she soon left *that* off. The little shining drops pricked her cheeks as they rolled down them, as if they had been so many needles, and kept saying, in a piping voice:

"Where do my tears keep, Mamma, when I'm

not crying? Why do they come when I'm hurt or sorry? It's very odd, isn't it? And, oh! what ever is it that makes them salt?—why shouldn't they be sweet? It would be so much nicer."

Ella was so surprised that she stopped crying directly, for she remembered quite well having asked her mother those very questions just before she went to bed; and she also recollected that her mamma had begged her not to tease, for that her head ached very badly, and had promised to tell her all about tears another time; but Ella would not wait, and bothered her poor sick mamma until she told her. And yet now she could not remember one word of it all; and there were these odious, selfish, cruel tears pricking her cheeks, making them tingle and smart, and calling out all the time, "Tell us now; be quick—we want to know this minute."

"I'll look in that big book which Miss Kirke says tells one everything, directly after breakfast," said Ella, "if you will only let me alone now. I'll never cry again, that's certain; what is the good of it if one's tears are to turn round and bully one?"

But Ella felt so angry, she went on crying until she could bear the pain of all the little stabs on her cheeks no longer, and jumped up to run out of the room. If she thought, however, that she was going to escape from her troubles so easily, she found herself mistaken. The very moment she touched the door, its handle began to turn round and round like the handle of a barrel-organ, and it ground out a sort of tune like this:

"Stay a moment, Ella, dear:
Tell, oh tell me why I'm here?
What's the good of keys and locks?
Why don't doors open before one knocks?
What, I pray, are those knobs of brass?
Why has Auntie got them of glass?"

Dear me, Ribbon, I didn't know you could make up such beautiful verses! Let me see, where were we? Oh, at the door! Well, you must know, Ella had asked just such silly ques-

tions only the Sunday before, but she had remembered something else she wanted to know about before her aunt could answer, and she had run away whilst she was speaking, but still she remembered the beginning for a wonder, and said quite boldly, "We lock our doors to keep out people; bad people—perhaps robbers."

"Oh, do you?" grated out the key, making a horrid rusty sound, which set all Ella's teeth on edge; "that's very curious now. And who are robbers? and why do they come? and what do they want? and——"

"Oh, stay, stay!" cried Ella, "I don't know all that. I must have some breakfast first. I never heard Jane bring it in, but there it is, and I am really so hungry and tired with all these questions. I hope Nurse won't mind my eating my breakfast in my nightgown just for once. I have tried to wake her, and I've tried to dress myself, but those odious things won't let me. How stupid they all are! Well, Jane has brought up a nice

breakfast! Why, here's jam and poached eggs, and toast. It must be mamma's breakfast, I should think. Perhaps she has got my bread and milk by mistake. Never mind, it is not my fault; I had better eat it as it is here."

So saying, she sat down on a chair, still in her little nightgown, you know, without having washed or dressed, or said her prayers, or anything, and she drew the plate with the poached eggs towards her; but the moment she touched it, a lot of the same little crooked creatures laid hold of the other end, and gave a tug all together, just as sailors do at a rope, you know, and they jerked the plate away, and all lifted up their crooked little forefingers, like this, and said solemnly:

"Ella! Why don't the hens always lay their eggs poached? Just answer us that!"

"I don't think I care for any eggs this morning," said Ella, bravely. "I'll have some jam, if you please:" but when she took the cover off the glass dish, three large wasps flew out; yet they didn't

fly away. Oh, no! they kept buzzing right over the jam, and this is what they buzzed. "What is jam made of?—buzz-z-z. Why do they boil it?—buzz-z-z. Why do they put sugar?" and a lot more questions, all about jam; with a great deal of buzzing between.

"Perhaps Mamma would rather I did not have any jam this morning," remarked Ella, putting the lid on again, and shutting in the wasps. "I will try and cut myself some bread." So she took up the knife and began to cut the nice brown loaf, but she could not manage it. The horrid knife slipped every time, and came down crack on the plate, until I wonder it did not break it. Every time it came down crack it said a word, like this. "What . is . bread . made . of? Why . do . they . make . it . of . wheat? Who . grinds . the . wheat? Where . is . it . ground?" So you can see how often and low hard poor Ella tried to get her breakfast; for the knife only said one word every time it slipped.

At last she gave it up with a sigh, and put down the knife, which immediately stood up on its handle and jumped up and down like a Perfect Cure, and rapped out, "What are knives made of?- Why are they so sharp? Will the back of the blade cut as well as the front?" and a number of silly questions, to which Ella paid no attention, for she spied the milk-jug, and thinking to take it by surprise, never waited to pour out any milk into a cup, but-first turning her head to make sure Nurse was still sound asleeplifted up the jug and tried to drink out of it. But, oh, what a jump she gave! A great, deep voice, as if some one were speaking in the jug. asked in a hollow kind of roar, "Where does milk come from? Why is it white? Why isn't it black? Why is it warm? What makes it get cold?" All these severe questions asked suddenly, quite startled Ella, and she dropped the milk-jug so hastily that it broke, and every little bit of the china began waltzing round and

round, singing:—"Who will mend me? why did I break?" and a lot more questions, as fast as possible, making a sort of little tum-a-tum between each, just to mark the time.

Poor Ella! You would have felt quite sorry for her, if you could have seen how sad she looked, sitting there, with only her nightgown on, in the cold, with a nurse who would not wake up and help her, and clothes and food which insisted on knowing all about themselves before they would allow her to put them on or to eat them.

She sat quite still, with her hands on her lap, wondering what she had better do next. The fire was all laid ready to be lighted, and she thought what fun it would be to go and strike a match and light it; but just at that moment the little gilt bear which held the matches sneezed, and lifted up his head at the neck, so Ella knew he was ready to say something if she touched him; and as for the coals there were such a lot

of them, that she felt directly, if they all began to ask questions together, and all different questions too, there would be no such thing as stopping them. So she turned her head aside, and said quite softly to herself—inside herself, you know, not with her lips at all—"What a good thing it is I can't ask myself any questions." "Oh, can't you?" answered herself to herself; "you'll find you can, though. Who torments other people to death, wanting to know something or the other all day long, just for the sake of asking questions; who does that, eh?"

Ella could not stand this any more. It was really too much, you know, when one began scolding oneself like that, so she rushed to her bed, and flung herself down on her knees, as if she were going to say her prayers, and called out quite loud, "Ella, Ella! but she never will do so any more." And then she jumped up and scrambled into bed, feeling so thankful that the sheet did not ask her any questions, and she

cuddled herself up as warm as she could, but still it seemed very cold. However, she managed to get to sleep again; that is to say, she thought she went to sleep, but it was really that the Dreamsylph got all her little crooked people together and chased them out of poor Ella's head, so as to let her have some peace and rest. As soon as the last stray question had been caught by that lady in the black veil all over diamond eyes, and tumbled out upon the pillow to find his way home as best he might, Nurse woke up with a start, feeling as if somebody had taken a plug out of each ear.

"Bless me," she cried, "how late it is! And there's that child gone and kicked all the blankets off her, and she must be as cold as a stone. Wake up, Miss Ella, dear; look where you've got your blankets too! Whatever has made you toss and tumble about in that way?"

"Oh, Nursey," said Ella, not even opening her eyes, but turning round so as to hide her head in the pillow, "Don't, pray don't, ask me any questions, you can't think how tired I am of them! Everything has been so horrid. I couldn't wash, or dress, or eat my breakfast for the way they wanted to know all about how they were made, and where they came from."

Nurse looked very much surprised. No wonder; my nurse would be astonished to hear me talk that way, though she often says, "Miss Ethel do talk a powerful lot of nonsense, don't she?" But that's only because she doesn't understand. Ella's nurse did not understand either, and felt quite frightened. Indeed she was still more frightened when Ethel let herself be dressed quietly and silently, without wanting to know what soap was made of, or where sponges grew, or why buttons were made round, or why people wore clothes at all, and all her usual foolish questions.

"I hope the child isn't ill," Nurse thought to herself. When Ella went to her lessons she was so quiet, and good, and silent, that Miss Kirke went to her mamma and said—

"Do you know, I fear Ella can't be quite the thing. She has not asked me a single question all lesson-time."

"Send her here," said Mamma. "Ella, my child, what is the matter with you? Both Nurse and Miss Kirke say you are quite unlike your little chatterbox self this morning. Has anything happened to vex you, dear?"

"Oh, Mamma," cried Ella, gulping down her tears for fear they should prick her cheeks, "you can't think how horrid everything has been, all except my bed; that did not ask me any questions, thank goodness."

When Ella said this, her mamma got up and rang the bell, and said, "Send for the doctor."

"Don't, please don't, dear Mamma," cried Ella in alarm; "he'll be sure to ask me such a lot of questions!"

But the doctor didn't, though; he just felt her

pulse, and looked at her tongue, and said, "A little disarrangement of the stomach, very slight—a-hem!—a small powder at bedtime, and perhaps a draught in the morning, will remove all unpleasant symptoms. There is no cause for uneasiness, my dear madam—a-hem!" And so he went away; and Nurse gave Ella her powder in a spoonful of the same jam she had tried so hard to eat in her dream.

"Are there any wasps in it?" she asked; but before Nurse could answer she cried, "Oh, I didn't mean to ask a question, indeed I didn't."

"No, my dear, there ain't no wapses," said Nurse very kindly, "and I'd dearly like to hear you ask a question or two, just to show you ain't off your head."

"No, Nurse, I'll never, never ask any more questions," answered Ella, and I don't believe she did either, do you, Ribbon?

CHAPTER II.

TEA IN THE WOODS.

"WILL! Will, Will—lee!" shouted little Polly Gardner one fine August morning to her lazy brother. Polly was standing just outside the porch of the Rectory, and calling as loud as ever she was able. It was such a beautiful morning that you could not believe anybody would like to lie in bed, unless they were too sick to get up. But Willy Gardner was in bed, and snoring too, although he was quite, perfectly well. Laziness was the only thing the matter with him, and if he had anything to do, even in his play, he used to give up directly, and say, "Oh! I'm tired to death; and sick of the whole thing." Fancy a boy being so lazy as that!

Polly did not look lazy as she stood there with the clematis over the porch hanging down until it nearly touched her, and making her seem exactly as if she were a picture of a bright, good, nice little girl, instead of being the little girl her own self. I should like so much to have had Polly for a sister, and she would have liked it too I am sure, if she had been real, for she had no sister, only this one brother Willy, and he was half his time asleep, or resting, or else eating. He was not a bit like Ralph or Oswald, who are really very nice, considering they are only boys, so Polly was not so well off as me.

Willy Gardner had a little room all to himself, built over the pantry, and sticking out by the side of the porch. Outside it looked very pretty with a great big Virginia Creeper all over its red walls, and some ivy, and even some clematis from the porch, which had thrown out a long branch and caught hold of a nail or something,

and was helping to cover up that new part of the house, and make it look as green and pretty as the old. Yes, outside, it was very pretty, but inside—ach! We know what boys' rooms are inside, don't we, Ribbon dear? There were not only strings of birds' eggs and cases of butterflies-poor little things, why can't boys let them alone. I wonder?—but there were the heads of little birds cut off and dried, and then nailed in the middle of a little rosette; for an ornament, as Willy said. At least that is what Ralph and Oswald do, and they get me to make the rosette for them, and I daresay Polly had to do just the same! Besides the birds' heads there were the skins of mice, tanned, and cut into little mats, and Polly had to bind them round with ribbon, though she hated doing it, and then in one corner a row of rabbits' tails-scuts, the boys call'em, I believe—was neatly nailed against the wall. Every time Willy shot a rabbit he cut off its tail and fastened it up there. He had not

shot a great many, however. I suppose because he was so lazy, though he might have done so, for he had a real gun, and could go out and shoot rabbits whenever he liked. But then he would have had to get up early or stay out late, you know, because the bunnies keep in their holes all day when it is so hot, and only pop up to feed early in the morning and late at night, just when they feel certain that lazy boys won't come out after them.

The reason Polly had got up so early, for I really don't believe it was seven o'clock yet, or anything like it, was because it happened to be her birthday, and one always gets up early on one's birthday to make it as long as possible. How dreadful it must be for those poor children whose birthdays come in the winter! Polly's birthday was in—let me see—in August, just like mine. That's the best time, for it is not too hot, and the boys haven't gone back to school yet. I should have liked mine in June,

because of the strawberries, but August will do very well, and Polly liked hers in August on account of what happened every year on her birthday.

Ever since Polly could remember anything her birthday treat had always been the same—tea in Stock Wood. Oh it was such a delightful place, and I am going to tell you all about it. The reason Polly got up so early was to see if it was going to be a fine day, for once, a long time ago—a whole year, I daresay—it had been wet, and there could be no tea in Stock Wood. And although Mr. and Mrs. Gardner, who were very kind people, did all they could to make up to Polly for her disappointment, still it had been very, very sad for her to be obliged to have tea in the house on her birthday just like other There was no fear of that happening today, however, for not only was the sun shining, and not a cloud to be seen anywhere, but the swallows were flying quite high, and when Polly asked old Hollenby the gardener, who was the only person up and about so early, he had answered, "A fine day is it going to be then? Bless your little heart, Miss, it'll be the beautifullest day of the whole year. A trifle warm or so for the poor harvest-men, but no doubt the Squire'll consider that in the beer."

It seemed rather horrid to think of beer so early in the morning, when Polly had not even had her breakfast yet, but it reminded her that she was hungry, or, I should say, thirsty; and as she spied the cows coming out of the field, she ran off for her own little mug and took it to Jim Stickles, and said, "It's my birthday, Jim, and I've come for a little milk, if you please."

Jim was rather a cross old man, something like our Jim, and was bent almost in two with rheumatics, still he would go on driving the cows in and out of the field and milking them, and when Papa—I mean Mr. Gardner—said, "Jim, you'd better have a boy to help you do all the hard

work;" Jim would try to straighten himself and say, "Noa, noa, Measter, thank you kindly all the same, but sure-ly I'd have to drive the boy as well as the dumb beasts. Noa, if yer want to gie me hextra work, gie me that little yalla cow that's for sale over-bye; but don't gie me any boys, I beg yer." That's what Jim used to say. Sometimes if his back was very bad he'd be cross to Polly; that is to say, not exactly cross to her, you know, but he would say things to the cows which Polly felt quite sure he would not have said if she had not put him out by coming into the shed with her mug.

However, as it was her birthday, Jim could not possibly be cross to the little girl. He only looked at her and said, "It's a fine day for a birthday then, and I hope we may tak' it for a sign all yer days will be bright; until yer gets the rheumatics, that's to say, Miss. Give us yer moog thin, and we'll fill it for yer."

So Polly drank her milk, and it was so delicious

that she begged for some more to take to Willy, for Willy liked new milk very much if he could have it without the trouble of getting up for it. Polly must have been a very good-natured little girl, for although I fag for Ralph and Oswald, I do it because they are really nice boys. I am quite sure I would not wait upon such a lazy, selfish boy as that Willy. There he lay, snoring in bed, though the sun was shining—oh, so beautifully!—in at his window, and all the birds making such a row, singing, and chirrupping, and twittering, and old Hollenby sharpening his scythe every five minutes just outside his window. It was all as delicious as ever it could be, and Willy ought to have been up and out, feeding his rabbits, or looking at his night lines, or attending to some of the quantities of business boys seem to have always on their hands. But no, he lay there snoring, yet Polly shook him and even kissed him, saying so prettily,

"Wake up, Willy dear. It's my birthday, and it

is such a beautiful morning; it won't rain all day, Hollenby says, and we're going to have tea in Stock Wood, you know, and I've brought you some new milk."

That was the only thing she said which made Willy open his eyes. He didn't care whether it was his little sister's birthday, nor whether it was going to be fine, nor even where they were going to have tea, but he cared for the milk, so he opened one eye, and his mouth, and said, "Give it here." After he had drank it up, he turned round and covered himself up, and growled, "Now go away, and let's have another nap."

"Oh, Willy!" cried Polly, much disappointed; "it's my birthday; do get up."

"Look here," answered the horrid, rude boy, "birthday or not, if you don't take yourself out of this, sharp, I'll heave something at you."

Poor little Polly went away very sadly, but just then she heard Dale, her mamma's maid, calling her, and when she ran upstairs, Dale kissed her, and gave her a large roll of beautiful scraps of silk and ribbons and lace, and a little sprig of real artificial flowers, to dress her doll with. Then she took her into her mamma's room, and there were her mamma and papa wide awake, not a bit sleepy or cross, like Will, but full of play and fun, and bringing out every minute a book or a paintbox, or something delightful, from under their pillows, or from beneath the counterpane, and pretending to wonder who had put the things there, and who they were for. Of course they were all for Polly, and there were so many of them, and everything was so interesting and amusing to look at, that it didn't seem a minute between breakfast and dinner. Generally Polly found this part of the day rather long, because she missed having to do her lessons-for you know one does not even practise on one's birthdaybut this day passed as quickly as could be, and she did not think it could be anything like one o'clock when her mamma called out, "Where's

Polly? Polly dear, come and get your hat; the donkey-cart is going to be packed, and will soon start."

Can't you fancy how Polly sprang up and rushed away to put her boots on, and get her hat? And yet, though she was in such a desperate hurry, she was obliged to stop and jump a little, like this. because one makes all the greater haste afterwards if one gets rid of some of one's happiness first, that way. I'm sure I should burst if I did not dance a little when I'm very happy, and Polly felt just the same. First she had to go to the kitchen, for cook was calling her, and there were all the things spread out on the table for her to see before they were put up. That was part of the treat, for it made Polly feel exactly like her mamma; she tried to appear as if she ordered dinner every day, as she looked at the great basket of buns and asked, "Do you think you have got enough there, Mrs. Evans? The boys eat a great deal, you know."

But Mrs. Evans only smiled and said, "Lord love you, Miss, they can't eat all of them."

It was very wrong of the cook to speak that way, for she never did so to Polly's mamma; she must have forgotten that it was Polly's birthday. After that the little girl did not try to give any more orders, but she only said, as like her mamma as ever she could, turning round and walking away, this way, "It will all do very nicely, I daresay; I only hope the things won't get broken." Polly did not look behind, or she would have seen the cook laughing, and Sarah the kitchen-maid too, but as soon as she got outside, she saw the donkey-cart all ready, and it looked so delightful she was obliged to jump again.

"Come along, Polly," said her mamma; "we have to go round by the House, you know, and pick up all the children there. Willy has gone on already."

Polly thought in her heart that Willy might have waited for her, as it was her birthday; but she would not let the little cross feeling show its nose above the ground, because one must try as hard as ever one can to be good and nice on one's birthday. She did not say anything, but just took her mamma's hand and walked across the road, and through the big iron gates, down a beautiful hollow all shady with big trees, past a summer-house, across a very rickety little wooden bridge, up a lawn like a little hill, and so to the shady side of the big House, where the Squire lived.

Polly did not jump about now so very much. I suppose because she was really altogether too happy. When I'm too happy I am quite quiet, just the same as if I was sorry; and it was so very delightful altogether that Polly felt half afraid it might be all a dream, and that she should wake up and find she had slept too long and it was a wet morning. She even asked her mamma, as I did the other day at that picnic, "Mamma dear, do you think it is all quite

real?" and her mamma laughed, just as mine did, and said, "Yes, darling, quite real." After that Polly felt even happier, and let go her mother's hand, and ran on to where Willy and the other boys were standing. They all shouted when they saw her, and cried out, "Come and look, make haste;" but before she could get close up to them, Harry, the big boy, came up like the gentleman he was, and lifted his straw hat off his head, and shook hands with Polly, saying, "I wish you many happy returns of the day, Polly." That was rather awful, because Harry was such a big boy, at Eton; but still it was very delightful, and made Polly feel quite grown up. However, she had not much time to think about it, for all the other five boys came crowding around her, calling out altogether to keep each other in countenance,—for they never would have had courage to say it by themselves, as Harry did,—" Many happy returns; look what mother has given to the tea!" What, indeed? Such a

big basket of peaches. Polly had never seen so many peaches together in all her life, and the boys made her try to lift the basket, and she could hardly move it. Willy darted forward just then, and said, "I'll help you, Polly dear." If it had not been her birthday Polly might have wondered whether he would have offered to help her if it had been a basket of books or clothes for some poor person, but as it was, she could not think such things.

Indeed she had not much time to think anything, for Harry came forward in his stately way—he was sixteen, and quite grown up, you know—and said, "You must not attempt to carry it yourself, Polly. Here, Claude, you and Percy catch hold of this, and take care you don't let any of the boys get at it." Percy was Polly's pet of all the boys up at the House. He came two away from Harry, and was not so strong as the others, but he was the dearest boy you ever saw. He was not so cruel as other boys,

because he often had to suffer pain himself, and that made him understand better how it hurts creatures to be played roughly with. Boys don't know what an ache or a pain is generally, and they think other things are just the same. Then Percy had such a glorious voice; and when he used to shake his thick wavy curls back, in church, and sing as loud as he could, with his bright blue eyes looking straight through the narrow sidedoor, beyond the Rectory garden and the big trees, far away, as if he could see right up into the summer sky, Polly used to feel as if she were going to cry.

Percy was always very gentle with her too, though he was not a bit of a molly-coddle; still he did not seem to think she had no business in the world as the other boys did, because she could not jump with a pole, or climb trees, or play cricket all day long. And his face was just like one of the angels in the big picture in the drawing-room. Just like that, only nicer,

for the angel looked always the same, whilst Percy's face changed every time he spoke, and was what Papa calls "full of expression." At all events he was a very nice boy, and Polly always wished Willy had been like that, but he wasn't, was he?

Presently, in a minute or two, the boys all shouted out together, "Oh, here's mother and Violet! Come along, Vi!" Polly turned her head, and saw two ladies running down the broad steps of the House. They both looked just the same, though Mrs. Russell was Violet's mother, and not only her's, but the mother of all those great boys, Harry and all. She wasn't fat, and red, and puffy, as ladies so often are when they have a house full of children. She was as slim as her daughter, and her eyes were as bright and she laughed just as often and as sweetly as Violet did. But although Mrs. Russell looked so young and so pretty, it was Violet that Polly thought the most beautiful young lady in the

whole world, and wondered if she could ever possibly be like that when she grew up. Mrs. Russell and the boys were all dark, but Violet was as fair and as fresh as one of the roses growing against the porch. Not red roses, you know, nor quite white, but roses with just a little pink in them. And then she was not a bit proud, although her beautiful hair-which made Polly think of the sun shining over a field of ripe corn when she wore it hanging down over her shoulders-had been turned up, and dressed like her mamma's for nearly a year, and she wore a long gown like Mrs. Russell's, and did not romp about with the boys any more. Still she was not a bit proud, but came up and kissed Polly, and seemed just as delighted to think that it was a fine afternoon, and that they were going to have tea in Stock Wood, as Polly herself.

So they all set out, and even the boys went along tolerably steadily. There was so much to

think about. First, it was by no means sure that the donkey-cart could get up all the way to Stock Wood, for the old road had been shut up. and the new one was very rough indeed. That was a great anxiety, and Polly thought about it a great deal; then there was that great basket of peaches to be carried. You could not expect the boys to carry it steadily, and they changed about so often that at last it came to be nobody's business; and Violet and Polly, who were walking together, found it, left to its own devices, in the middle of the wood. So they picked it up and carried it for the rest of the way. They played Willy a trick about it though, for when they got to Stock Wood they hid it under a holly-bush, and when the boys came up they asked them, "Where are the peaches?" just as if they did not know. Willy was so frightened to think that they had been lost, or left behind, that he set up a loud boo-hoo, and ran about shaking his hands, like this, up and down, crying out, "Oh the peaches, the peaches! boo-hoo, boo-hoo. What shall we do? They're lost—oh, they're lost! It was all your fault, Claude." But it had really been Willy's fault that they were put down where Violet and Polly had found them, for it so happened it was Willy's turn to carry them, but as he was Polly's brother, and it was her birthday, nobody said anything to him, and he was soon comforted when they showed him the peaches under the holly-bush.

The first thing to do was to get wood for the fire, although the donkey-cart had not yet appeared, still it was as well to be ready, you know. Mrs. Russell and all helped. Polly worked very hard picking up twigs, but she did not know, until she tried, what hard work it is, nor what an immense long time it takes to get even an armful of sticks. I don't believe they would ever have had enough to boil the kettle if it had not been for one of the boys, Georgie I think it

must have been, who came upon a big stack of faggots hidden away in the wood, already cut, and tied up into bundles, ready to be carted away. Georgie lost no time in hoisting one of these bundles up on his back, and staggering back to the tea-party-place with it. He looked so funny as he came along; no little boy to be seen at all, nothing but a great, huge bundle of sticks, which seemed to be walking along on a pair of legs of its own. When the others saw him they clapped their hands, and cried, "Well done, Georgie! bravo, Georgie!" But Harry, though he laughed at first, looked grave directly, and said, "Hullo, Georgie, where did you find that?"

"Down there," said Georgie, sticking up his head as well as he could with such a weight on his shoulders.

"Well, then, you must just take it back again to where you found it, for I know all those faggots have been sold to Farmer Fenton, and we must not touch them." 11.]

All the other boys set up a clamour, and said it was a shame; but Georgie saw that Harry was in earnest, and knew that he was right, so he staggered off with his load, and put it in its place again, and dragged a great bough of a tree back to make up the fire.

By this time the donkey-cart had arrived, and the kettle was all ready, full of water and everything, but there was no fire. It wouldn't light, and no wonder, for the pile of wood looked more as if they were going to make a bonfire than boil a kettle. At last Mrs. Russell came to the rescue, and got Harry to heave up the great pile, using a thick stick for a poker, and she shoved in some paper, and at last a blaze came.

"Fetch the sticks to hang the kettle on!" some one cried, but the only sticks to be found were absurd little things, not nearly so tall as I am. If they had tried to hang the kettle on them, it would have been completely in the

flames, handle and all; so Harry said, "This won't do, you know; Willy, go and fetch three hop-poles. There are a lot stacked yonder; bring the shortest you can find." But Willy was much too stupid and lazy to take the trouble of searching for proper sticks, so he just picked up the first poles he came across, and returned in a minute or two, trailing three huge, clumsy things after him. They were not right at all, and even Harry looked disgusted, and said, "What a muff!" But there was no time to lose, for the fire was burning away, and it they did not make haste they would have had to go and fetch a lot more sticks; so they managed as well as they could, and tied them together with an iron chain, and hung the kettle on them, just as real gipsies do, and then they all took hands, and danced round and round the fire. Violet, and Harry, and all. But they could not do that very long, for they had put on such a lot of wood that the blaze got quite tremendous,



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and it flared away all to blew it, until it caught a standing some way off. it was Polly herself who could have heard how ! "Oh, save it, save it! th be quite spoiled." They a they could hardly do any why she wanted it save course; to decorate it a Christmas. Whenever M holly or a laurel bush, of be green and nice in to herself directly, "I'll that." So all the time sh the cloth, and setting o and the buns and the pea thinking to herself. At says my mamma does, just the same.

But nobody wanted the

burned, and Mrs. Russell shrieked out, "Some bracken! get a lot of green bracken and stifle the blaze." In a moment all the boys and girls had flung themselves into a great patch of tall green fern, and they pulled and pulled away as hard and as fast as ever they could. But in another minute there was a loud cry of "My finger, look here!" and everybody was showing everybody else their finger, for the bracken had cut them all as if it had been a knife. Even Violet's gloves had not saved her hands, which were cut as badly as the boys'. However, there was no time to tie up the wounds, for the flames mounted higher and higher, and Mrs. Gardner kept calling louder and louder, "Oh, save it!" meaning the holly. So they all rushed back in a minute or two with their arms quite full of the damp, green bracken, and bravely flung it down on the blazing fire, and then in another minute there was a dreadful smoke. It nearly choked them; but the fire did not blaze anv more for a minute or two, so they thought it was a good chance to get the kettle off and make the tea. The grown-up ladies, and even Violet, said the tea wasn't very nice when it was made, and that the water was smoked, and hadn't boiled; but then, you know, ladies are so awfully particular over their tea. Polly thought it perfectly delicious, especially when it was discovered that the spoons had been forgotten, and she had to stir her tea with a little bit of stick. So they sat there as happy as happy could be, with the tall trees over their heads, making a beautiful shade, and squirrels and birds in the branches, watching until they went away to come and eat up all the crumbs. The peaches were very good too, and their juice ran down Polly's fingers into her lap, but nobody said a word, because she couldn't help having no plate.

Polly felt quite sorry when tea was over, although they all ate and drank as much as ever they could to make it last longer; but even Willy

was obliged to say at last, like fat Fenetta in the funny song, "No, thank you, mum, I'm full." Cook proved right after all, for they could not possibly eat all the buns, and there were a good many left. Polly looked so grave at this that her mamma said, "We'll look out for some hoppers as we go home, and give the rest to them." That cheered her up; she only did not want cook to see how foolish her fear of a bunfamine had been.

After tea Mrs. Russell jumped up as gaily as Violet or even Polly could have done, and called out, "Who'll come and play at Dumb Crambo?" Of course they all wanted to go out with her, but she would only take three boys at a time. That still left a lot with Mrs. Gardner, and Violet, and Polly, and they set them such difficult words, that it became tremendous fun to see Mrs. Russell doing "stride," or Harry acting a pony, and Percy trying to "ride" him. Then for another word they had to fly, and to cry, and to sigh, and to do all

sorts of absurd things. They laughed until Polly felt sorry she had eaten so many peaches; and they were no graver over "Shouting Proverbs." Everybody had one word of a proverb, and when Violet clapped her hands, everyone said it as loud as ever they could. But you always heard Harry's word the plainest, and then the poor person who was out used to say quite helplessly, "I didn't hear a word except 'the,' or 'all,' or 'not,' (whichever was Harry's word), which was sure to be a stupid little word, and no help at all to them. Then they sang funny glees and songs, and the more out of tune they sang the more they laughed; and Polly thought the birds must wonder if they ever meant to leave off and go away, and let them come down and get some supper in peace and quietness.

It's a great pity the sun always wants to set so soon on birthdays; long before Polly thought it could possibly be more than half-past three, Mrs. Russell looked at her watch, and cried—

"Dear me, who would have believed it could be so late? It is actually six o'clock. We must make haste home, or the Squire will be waiting for his dinner."

She called her husband that sometimes in fun, just as my mamma calls my papa if she wants to tease him. So they scrambled up all the things, and bundled them into the donkey-cart, but instead of sending it on again, Mrs. Gardner told the boy who was driving it to keep as near them as he could. That was on account of the buns in case they met any hoppers; and the curious thing was, that no sooner did they get out into the lane than they saw another donkey-cart very like their own coming towards them. Mrs. Russell said she was quite sure the travellers would think they too were hoppers, for they had torn their gowns, and the boys were in a shocking mess, of course; and they were all sunburnt, and hot, and tired, though it had been so happy. hoppers knew that they were not poor people, and that they had only been playing at what they themselves do every day, and don't consider such a treat.

So one woman, carrying a nice little rosy boy with bright black eyes, came up, and asked the good lady for a drop of milk "for the childer." Polly's mamma stopped the donkey-cart and gave her the big bottle of milk, which was not half empty, and all the rest of the buns, so "the childer" must have had a good supper that night.

"How I should like to be a hopper, Mamma," sighed Polly.

"Well, dear, next birthday, please God, if all's well, you shall go hopping instead of having tea in Stock Wood," said Mrs. Gardner.

"Oh, thank you, Mamma; that will be something delightful to think of all the time until next birthday," said Polly.

She wanted to tell the boys of the plan, but they were not to be seen anywhere just then; so the two ladies, and Violet, and Polly walked quietly

on. After they got out of the lane they came to a field which led them into another lane, with high banks, and rocks, and caves; but whilst they were crossing this field, such a splendid picture seemed to lie spread out before them. that Violet stopped, and said, "Look there, Polly; isn't it all beautiful?" And so it was. very beautiful, just like what Mamma and I saw the other evening coming home, only she said it was damp, and we must not stop and look at it any longer. In front of them a crop of late corn had been cut, and lay in soft yellow streaks across the green field. There wasn't much corn, and the grass or the young wheat had been able to grow very green and thick beneath. Then, beyond that again, but still close to them, was a large hop garden, with the hopvines hiding all the bare poles, and making little arbours and bowers as they trailed from one to the other, and such a lot of little, young, pale green hops hanging on the vines! The only things

you could see behind the hop-gardens were woods and low hills, some purple and some bluish; but behind them again a beautiful sky shone. The sun was just going down below one of the hills, so Violet and Polly could look at its bright yellow rays if they tilted their hats over their eyes. Like "Jerusalem the Golden," I (I mean Polly) thought, and she and Violet spoke in whispers, whilst they looked at all the glory and beauty before them.

"Don't let us stop and see it fade away," said Polly, softly; "let us always think of the sun going to bed on my birthday like that." So she took Violet's hand, and they ran on until they overtook Mrs. Russell and Mrs. Gardner, who were just entering the lane.

Violet knew what trickified creatures boys are, and, as she did not see them in front, said, "Where are those boys, Mamma? I'm sure they're going to play us a trick." While she was speaking, down came a large rock, rolling

and bumping into the narrow road before them. The ladies turned quite pale, as well they might, for if they had been the least bit nearer, some one would have been crushed. They thought they heard a scream, but Harry called out directly, "Don't be frightened, mother, it is quite an accident; we never meant to hurt or frighten you. We only intended to jump down into the road ourselves."

"But how did the rock give way?" asked Mrs. Gardner. "Is no one hurt?" Then the next minute she cried, "Where is Willy?" for she knew how naughty and troublesome the lad was. No Willy answered, and they went to look where the rock had fallen. There, in the dust, between it and the bank, lay Master Willy, very white, and quite quiet, as if he had been asleep. It's a mercy, as Nurse says, the rock had not fallen on him, for if it had, he must have been crushed as flat as a spider; but he had only lost his balance and tumbled down, after having pushed the rock over the edge. They picked him up, some carrying

his head, and some his heels; and they took him into a cottage which happened to be near, and laid him on the bed. After he had drunk some water, and washed the dust out of his ears and nose and mouth, he soon got well enough to walk, but he was very sulky and would not say much, for he was vexed at having tumbled down and hurt himself, instead of only frightening the ladies and covering them with dust. That's what he meant to do. Even if he had been a real boy, I shouldn't have been sorry for him; but Polly was actually sorry because he was her brother, and also because she was such a nice little thing.

It's nearly time for my tea now, so that must be the end of Polly's birthday. Perhaps she is a real little girl, and I may meet her some day. If ever I do, I must try and remember how she had tea in Stock Wood, and tell her all about it, in case she doesn't know.

CHAPTER III.

JOE GURGLES.

ONCE upon a time a boy called Joe lived with his father and mother in a little cottage just like that one down there where old Mrs. Fletcher lives. Let me see what sort of a boy Joe was. Rather fat, I think; and he must have had a big head, because he was always tumbling down. At least, I know Franky Davis is always tumbling over everything, and they say it is because he has a big head. Joe wasn't at all a bad boy, but stupid, very stupid; and his being so stupid made him do such funny things. Joe's mother—Dame Gurgles as she was always called—didn't think them funny, though. When at the harvest supper he fell flat down, over nothing at

all, with the great big beer-jug in his hand, just as he was going to put it on the table, everybody laughed except his sister Patience, whose new gown was all stained and spoilt with the beer. His father, the old farmer, did not mind much. because he was in such a good temper at his harvest having been all got in without a drop of rain from first to last; he only went to draw some more beer himself in another jug, for Joe had, of course, broken the one he had been carrying. He gave Joe a little kick with his foot as he passed. -not to hurt him, you know, but just in fun, and said, "Get up, boy; thee'll tumble once too often some fine day, and break that big head o' thine 'nstead o' my joogs." That was the way Farmer Gurgles talked. But the dame looked terribly cross at Joe, and cried, "If he would but break his bones 'stead o' my crockery it would be a good job!" Fancy one's own mother wishing one to hurt oneself! It is quite dreadful to think of.

Joe picked himself up, feeling quite stunned and

unhappy. His mother's cross words hurt him as much as if she had hit him ever so hard, and he first picked himself up sorrowfully, and then the pieces of the jug afterwards. Joe had a ridiculous way of feeling himself all over with his great flat hand, open, like this, to see if he were hurt; and he must have looked very foolish as he stood there with the handle of the jug in one hand, patting his big head carefully with the other, to see where the new bump was. Of course Ioe's head was a mass of bumps, and his shins and his elbows and knees were always black and blue, but nobody used to be sorry for him, or offered to do anything to make him well when he hurt himself. His father would say that he meant to get the carpenter to make a big go-cart for Joe to learn to walk in, and he pretended that the boy ought to be tied into his chair like the new baby.

However, as the harvest supper was a sort of party, they did not laugh so very much at Joe's tumble; and his father, when he came back from the cellar, said, quite good-naturedly for him, "Best go and clean thee'sself, lad, and coom and have a bit o' supper." But Joe could not help thinking of his mother's cross look when she wished he would break himself instead of her iugs, and he shook his big head and went slowly and sorrowfully away. He did not go to his own little room, as I should do if I were very sorry about anything, because he could only get up to it by a ladder in one corner of the kitchen where they were all having their supper, and the steps were so narrow and so steep that he very often slipped off them. He thought that would never do now, so he crept away out at the back door, past old Growler the mastiff, and so into the rick-yard, where all the new stacks were piled up, smelling sweet and nice in the fresh, cool air.

As he passed Growler, Joe stopped and rubbed his leg just to feel how the sore place on it was getting on. That had been a very bad place indeed, because the doctor had made it sore on

purpose. And it all came through Joe's tumbling down. One evening, at the beginning of that very summer, Dame Gurgles bade Joe go and fetch her something out of the tool-house, which happened to be near Growler's kennel. Joe was a very goodnatured boy, and always ready to run errands for his mother, or anybody else. So the moment the dame called out, "Just go and fetch me that peg with the string round it, Joe, there's a good boy." Joe set off, best pace. But although it was not really dark, nor anything like it, Joe never saw Growler's long chain stretched tight across the vard, for Growler himself had come out of his hot kennel and was gnawing a bone as far away as his chain would let him get. However Joe did not see the chain, so he caught his foot in it, and down he came, flat on his face, with a dreadful bump, on the paved yard. That was bad enough, but it was worse when Growler flew at him with a savage snap, and bit the piece right out of his leg, trouser and all,—not a very big bit, you know,

because I think by the time Growler had taken the trouser in his teeth, he found out it was Joe; but quite big enough to hurt horribly. You may imagine how Joe roared, and the dame roared too, and called out "Mad dog," until everybody came running out to see. She wanted Growler to be shot that very moment, and she threw her apron over her head, and declared she was "main sorry," but Joe must be smothered between two feather-beds directly. Joe howled worse than ever when he heard this, of course; and they all made such a noise among them, that the farmer came in from the hay-field to know what was the matter. He would not hear of either Growler or Joe being what he called "put out of the way," but he sent for the doctor, and the doctor made a bit of iron red-hot in the fire, and burned Joe's leg where Growler had bit him. Poor Joe thought that was almost as bad as being smothered; but he bore it pretty well, and his father gave him a bright shilling to comfort him.

It was quite natural that Joe should stop and rub his leg, but doing so only made him remember how unkind his mother had been to him, and how anxious she had seemed to put him out of the way. Joe did not even feel comforted when he had walked round all the hay- and corn-stacks. He fell down twice whilst he was doing this; once over a rake, and once he caught his toe against a stone. He would have liked to creep into the loose hav and go to sleep there, as he often did in the summer-time, but it was all too tightly packed now for that. The next best thing was to climb up a tall ladder right on to the top of the big centre stack, the one from which the flag was floating. It was so neatly thatched that Joe thought it would very likely be slippery, but then he remembered there would be the flag-staff to hold on by, so he made up his mind to venture. His father had often advised him not to climb up high places, saying, "Thee'll coom toombling doon, Joe, my lad, and thee'll break that thick head o' thine, once and for all." But although Joe remembered this warning, he felt so unhappy he didn't mind it; not out of regular naughtiness, you know, but only because he thought it could not matter to anyone whether he broke his head, "once and for all," or not. "Mother would be glad, I do believe," thought poor Joe dismally, as he sat up there on the top of the rick, with one arm round the stout stick from which the red hand-kerchief was fluttering, and his cheek pressed hard against the pale. He had dropped his cap whilst he was getting up the ladder, so he sat there bareheaded, with the cool breeze blowing on his hot forehead and his smarting eyes.

"I wish I had brought a bit of bread and cheese up in my pocket," he thought; "I'm main hungry." That was the curious way Joe had of saying he was very hungry. Franky Davis talks like that. Joe watched the great big round moon come slowly up from the edge of the field where

the mowers had cut through the hen partridge sitting close on her nest. "Pretty brown thing." Joe thought, "she'd rather ha' been cut to bits as she was, than go for to leave her eggs. I wonder, if one on 'em had a big 'ed, whether she'd have a down on it like Mother has on me? Doctor says I'll grow to my head, and that there ain't nowt the matter wi' it; but it du get me into trouble every day of my life, sure-ly. There's that jug gone to-day, and I so careful where I stepped and all." But Joe could not go on thinking these sad thoughts very long, partly because he felt ever so much cooler and better for the fresh air and the sight of that beautiful calm moon, so quiet over there, and partly because he kept getting more and more hungry every minute.

Just as he was making up his mind to come down from the top of the rick, he saw one of the men come out and look about by each stack, as if he were searching for something. "What can he want?" Joe said to himself. "Why, it's Ned Frampton; Father must have sent him for summut." And so the farmer had, but poor Joe little knew what. Ned had come to fetch the ladder away; he had no idea that Joe was perched up on the top of the rick, holding on to the flag-staff, and when he found what he was looking for, he just shouldered the ladder, although it was dreadfully awkward to carry, and staggered away with it. He did not come round to where Joe could have seen him, because it was shorter to go in at the back door; so after Joe had waited a little while, expecting to see him come round into the moonlight, he guessed rightly that he must have found what he wanted, and gone in by the other way.

All that side of the rick was in deep, dark shadow, so black that Joe felt quite frightened when he left off looking at the place which the moon made so bright and light, and he groped his way as well as he could over the slippery thatch, holding on to all the ropes as tight as

possible, to where he had left the ladder. could not well manage to look down over the side, but he felt with his feet for the top rung whilst he held on to the thatch. "Now I've got it!" cried Joe quite out loud; and as he said the words he loosened his hold a little, and then let go altogether. But no ladder was there, and Joe could not catch hold of anything, though he stretched out his hands, like this, and so he went over, and over, and over, until his head came bump against the ground; but the 'strordinary thing is, that he didn't stop even there. No, his head made a hole through the ground, and Joe went head first through and through the field, until he got right into the middle of the world. There was such a hard piece there, that he couldn't get any further, so he stopped, and got down upon his feet somehow, and stood up rubbing his head tremendously, for it hurt a good deal, you know, after having bored such a deep, deep hole.

At first he saw nothing but sparks—just as we see if we come bump on our heads when we are skating, or anything like that; but after a little while he saw that the sparks were really little lamps on the top of men's heads. Such funny little men, too! Quite black and shiny, with red jackets and loose red trousers: and these bright lamps fastened on their heads instead of hats. They were as busy as bees, darting here, there, and everywhere; but very good-natured and happy. Joe's first thought, as he sat rubbing his head rather dolefully, was, "I wish I had a lamp like that on my head; I am sure I shouldn't tumble down any more if I had." He must have said it out loud, for before he knew where he was he saw a little spark of light flaming at the tip of his nose, and a lot of shrill, but very sweet, voices called out, "As many as you like, Joe Gurgles! You are kindly welcome down here, and you shall have as many lamps as ever you choose. Come and look at yourself!" Joe felt something tickling his leg, and there were a heap of tiny lamp-men tugging away at his boot-lace, trying to haul him up by it. When Joe understood what they meant he got up, and all the lamps flitted before him like so many Will o'the Wisps, and arranged themselves in a line on each side of a great black, bright place, which served as a looking-glass. So Joe marched up as brave as possible (for he could not be frightened when he was so much bigger than all the lamp-men put together), and he found himself opposite to the sort of wall. It looked like a large slab of coal, only it was polished until it shone as brightly as his mother's brass candlesticks; and in this funny kind of looking-glass he could see himself quite well.

They had hung him all over lamps, indeed! Besides the one on his nose—which he could see by shutting one eye and squinting at it, so—he had a dear little lamp hanging like an ear-ring to each of his big ears, and one dangled from his

chin, and there were such a lot in his hair! Here, there, and everywhere; wherever they found a lock of hair sticking up by itself-and Joe's hair grew all over his head in that manner—there they hung a lamp which shone beautifully, and made Joe think himself a very fine fellow indeed. "I'm powerful smart, now," said Ioe, in his quiet, drawling way, just like Franky Davis; "I could see through a brick wall now, I should think. Whatever do you need such a lot of lamps down here for, I wonder!" Well, you know, if Joe had not been a very stupid boy he would not have asked that question, for of course it must be quite, quite dark in the middle of the world; but he never thought of that. However, the busy little lamp-men were very good-humoured (that was because they were so busy; Mamma says idle people are much more likely to be cross and nasty than those who have got plenty of useful work to do), and did not feel at all affronted at Joe's questions. They only said, speaking all at once, but even then not so loud as I do, "We must have light to do our play and our work by, of course." "Oh, I see!" said Joe, thinking himself very sharp indeed. "You're a lot of little colliers. I always did wish to go down a mine, and now I s'pose I've been and gone and done it. What a queer little lot of chaps you be, sure-ly!"

"Colliers, indeed!" screamed all the lamp-men, but in a very softly scream; "no, indeed; our work is much more important than colliers, although they are bigger than we are. Just now you see the off-gang, but when it is our turn to go on you shall come with us and see what we do. Ah! it would be a poor business for all of you idle people up above if we ever fell out among ourselves and didn't work regular;" and they all shook their heads so that the lamps quivered and jumped about, and Joe felt quite dazzled and giddy. "Are you going anywhere?" he asked. "Yes, of course," they cried. "We are

resting now; this isn't the workroom, it's the play-place. You will be able to find your way quite easily, to the—sh-sh-sh, don't tell him yet—with all those lamps. If you find it too dark we'll hang out a few more."

Then Joe began to explain to them that he was not afraid of the dark, but that he had such a big head he tumbled down constantly, and there might be precipices and things perhaps, which would make it awkward for all parties. But he seemed to himself to take a long time to explain all he wanted them to know, and to his surprise he found himself crying about it, and sobbing over an account of how unkind his mother was to him, and how she wished he'd break his big head instead of her jugs. "Oh, we'll soon cure you of tumbling down!" shouted the lamp-men, in their quiet little voices. "Stand up, and we'll steady you fast enough; you cannot ever tumble down with this, you know." Now what do you think this was? A rest for the head. exactly like what Joe had his head fixed in when he went to have his picture taken in the market town. There it all was, exactly the same, and Ioe found himself standing straight up against the long pole, with his head firmly fixed in the rest, so that he thought at first it really might be a very good plan to prevent his tumbling down, for he could not possibly fall. you know, when his head was fastened upright. But he found out after a bit that they had screwed it ever so much too tight, and it hurt him horribly; and he wanted to take his head out. but the lamp-men did not appear to hear him, for they took no notice of him when he begged them to unscrew the machine. He even promised he wouldn't tumble down any more, but I am sorry to say that the lamp-men only laughed, and when one of them said, "Go on with the treatment"—which Joe thought a very curious thing to say—they all ran off to a heap of broken jugs, and basins, and cups and saucers, all bits of patterns which Joe remembered quite well, and each lamp-man flung a bit at poor Joe, who stood quite helpless there.

It must have been the lamps on their heads which enabled them to see so well how to take aim, for every one of the nasty sharp pieces hit Joe, and hurt him. He called out more than once, "Well, you are a pretty set of cowards, to set upon one poor boy like this! Why, you ought to be ashamed of yourselves!" "Oh. nonsense!" the little lamp-men cried; "it's only the treatment, you'll be better presently-keep him quiet." Joe was just going to give a loud roar, thinking perhaps that might frighten them off, when he heard a bell begin to ring; and the curious thing was, the bell sounded exactly like the school-bell at his own place, but it could not have been that, you know, because he was right exactly in the middle of the world-well, at all events it rang loud enough. Tingle, tingle, tingle it went, and all the lamp-men dropped the pieces of broken crockery which they were busy shying at poor Joe, and ran up to him, and began shoving him about. He found out then that the machine was on wheels, and it certainly kept his head very steady, though it still hurt a good deal, but he got on very quickly. Such a lot of galleries, and passages, and places as they shoved him through as fast as fast could be, with an immense number of other lamp-men scampering after them, and the bell ringing all the time. "We'll be late, we'll be late; and then there'll be an accident in the sky," they cried. "Come along, Big-head;" and they flew faster and faster, and the head-rest pinched poor Joe tighter and tighter. But at last they stopped, and then Joe found himself in the funniest place you ever saw.

It was immensely long, but not very high; a sort of a round room. Round, all round it, I mean; a round floor, and round sides, and round roof. I suppose it would have been quite dark, for it certainly was black—I am quite sure about that

-if it hadn't been for the lamp-men who were there in thousands working with all their might. Now what do you think they were doing? I daresay you won't believe me, because nobody ever did believe poor Joe when he said the very same thing; they seemed to be pushing and pushing, as hard as ever they could, at a great bar of iron which ran right through the middle of the world, and served for it to turn upon. That's what Miss Kirke calls the axis, and she stuck a pencil through an orange the other. day—it was such a pity to spoil the orange, thought I-and explained it all to me. I must ask her if it is really iron or what, this axis, for I don't quite understand; but it must be something very strong, if the world has got to turn upon it. It can't possibly go by itself either: somebody must push it, so we'll play that the lamp-men push it, and Joe went down and saw them at work, and that's the way I came to hear about it.

The schoolmaster at the school had been ex-

plaining it to Joe, I know, for Miss Kirke said "every village child knew it," and I asked Franky Davis when he was leading my pony if he knew about it, and he said, "Is it the h'axes, Miss? Oh, yes, it runs slick through the middle of the world!" So Joe must have known about it, though he never expected to see it. However, there it was, and the world turning round upon it. First of all Joe thought the lamp-men were shoving the bar of iron itself, but I remember now that Miss Kirke says, 'No, it isn't that which moves at all, it's the earth.' So after a little while Joe saw that the lamp-men kept running up and down the slippery sides of the long round gallery, exactly as mice run up the round wire sides of their cages, and in that way they made the world turn as fast as fast could be, but quite smoothly.

When one set of lamp-men were tired others took their places; but they would not let Joe help because they said his head was too big, and he might shove too hard. Joe had to stand right

in the middle close to the axis, and he might have found out a great deal more about it if he hadn't gone and touched the axis, and the moment he did that, everything appeared to vanish away with a buzzing sound, and Ioe seemed to open his eyes (though Patience said they'd been wide staring open all the time), and there he was, lying in his mother's bed, with all the doors and windows set open; and the dimity curtains blowing softly about in the breeze, and a great big piece of ice in his hands. It was all very odd, as odd as the place where the lampmen lived. He saw his mother, very pale, and with her eyes quite red and watery, stooping down to kiss him, and saying, "My own precious boy;" and his father in his house clothes, and without his boots, standing at the foot of his bed, looking very frightened and puzzled; and the big doctor from the nearest town, whom Joe had often seen drive by in his gig. Not the little doctor, who always went about in

breeches and boots, though he couldn't have ridden a donkey to save his life; but the big, grand doctor, who only attended the quality. This doctor's voice sounded exactly like the way the lamp-men talked; and although Joe was too astonished to speak, he knew quite well what he was going to say.

"Go on with the treatment, and keep him quiet," the doctor said. And then Joe shut his eyes, for he thought that he was going to be pelted with bits of broken jugs. But he wasn't at all, though; somebody gave him something nice in a spoon, and he thought he'd rest a little. When he opened his eyes again it was getting dark, and he could hear the clatter of the milk-pans downstairs, and all the other evening noises which go on in the country. After the middle of the world it hardly seemed dark to Joe, so he said, finding it very difficult to say anything, his tongue felt so lazy.

"Light my lamps, will you, Patience."

"Only one rushlight is all you are to have in' the room, Joe, dear," answered his sister; "the doctor says light is bad for you."

"Well, then, take my head out of this horrid rest, please; it pinches me so."

"Poor boy, he's talking main nonsense, still," sighed his mother softly; but she said it very kindly, and gave Joe another kiss, and put her nice cool hand on his forehead; and Joe found it all so very surprising that he was too much astonished to ask any questions.

When he woke up he knew quite well that it was morning, and yet he felt as if he was obliged to say, "Might I have a bit of supper, Mother?" Now, this was because Joe remembered perfectly he had wanted some supper; and although he did not understand how it came to be morning so quickly, he was too confused to say "breakfast."

"Bless his dear heart, he shall have summat directly," said his mother, who had on a frilled cap and wrapper, and was sitting in the arm-chair by Joe's bedside. "Just let me dress this nasty blister first."

Joe was more and more surprised, for he didn't know people ever had blisters on; he thought it was only cows and horses. His mother lifted his head ever so gently round on the pillow, and seemed to take it out of the picture-man's rest, for she did something to it which made it feel quite cool and comfortable and nice directly. Joe had never enjoyed anything in his whole life so much as the cup of tea she then brought him; and what made it even twice as nice was to see how pleased his mother seemed to be at his liking it so much.

By degrees, after Joe had had more sleep, and plenty of broth and new milk, and all sorts of good things, his mother told him one evening, sitting by his bedside when it was getting dark (and Joe could not help wondering what could be the meaning of those warm drops which fell upon his hand every now and then), that he had indeed tumbled down "once and for all;" for that Ned Stickles had taken

away the ladder, not knowing Joe was still upon the top of the stack, and that he had fallen on the top of his head right down on the paved yard. "Growler barked so, we were forced to come out and see what ailed him, and even then we'd never ha' seen thee lying in a heap all in the black shadow, if the dog hadn't a-kep' lepping at his chain towards the place."

"Were you sorry, Mother?" Joe could not help asking, though he wished he had not done so when his mother cried out sharply—

"Main sorry, my lad. I'd a given my own life any day for yourn as ye lay here raving and rambling o' broken joogs, and lamps, and axises and all sorts o' queer things. The school-bell seemed to stir ye up so, that we had it stopped for three days, but they'll begin to-morrow, if so be as ye can stand it in yer head."

Joe did stand it quite well, and got the schoolmaster to come and see him, and asked him all about the axis; but the master did not want to

talk about it at all for a long time, though he laughed when he heard of the lamp-men running up, up, like squirrels, and keeping the great big world moving round. It was such nonsense. you know. But there was one good thing which came out of Joe's illness. Whilst he lay sick there of brain-fever, his legs, and indeed his whole body, grew, and grew, and grew. When he got up and could stand, and even walk a little, he was nearly as tall as his mother, and the best of it was, his head had not grown a bit—on account of the blister, Joe always said; so it was not too big any more, and he never tumbled down again. The Dame bought a lot more jugs, and basins, and cups, and things, and Joe never broke one, because he could walk quite steadily now, and his head was just the right size for his tall body; so you see that fall turned out to be a very good thing for Joe as well as for all the "joogs."

CHAPTER IV.

A MOUSE'S WEDDING.

"My eldest daughter Bruna is going to be married to-morrow to young Friskett, of the Granary, over the way; I hope you will all come to the supper party."

This is what old Mrs. Bright-eyes said to her friends and neighbours the other day. It was whilst the summer still made the nights so hot for us, especially when the moon shone, as it was doing just then. Mice are obliged to give their parties on moonlight nights because they can't understand about gas. They eat their candles, and think us, I daresay, excessively foolish for burning them away. How stupid

we should consider anyone who hung plum-cakes, and apricot jam, or even beef and mutton, about a room to see to dance by, instead of eating it all up for supper! Well, mice look upon candles exactly in the same way.

There were great preparations for this wedding, I can tell you. Old Mr. Bright-eyes said it was all a dreadful trouble, and that he should be ruined, and asked his wife very often if she thought he was made of cheese-parings and apple-pips, and so forth. But she always answered, "It's only once in a way, you know, my dear; and I am sure you would like your eldest daughter to be married comfortably and nicely." He was a kind old mouse that, though his whiskers were getting very grey, and he declared he liked better to sit well within his hole than to come out on the Granary floor on ever so fine a night and race about with the others.

"You see, Mother," he would say, "it's all very well for the young folks, but I'm a deal too stout

to run as I used to; and if—if, I say, it should happen that—well, you know what I mean—there might be a cat-astrophe."

Mr. Bright-eyes did not mean anything when he said this, but his wife gave such a squeal and a jump you could have heard her all over the house.

"Oh, John, John, you will be the death of me, some day! How can you say such horrid things?"

Mr. Bright-eyes felt rather ashamed of himself, though it had been quite an accident; for you must know it is considered the worst possible manners in the mouse-world to allude, ever so distantly, to the existence of cats. Of course all mice know there are such creatures, and they never really cease thinking of them for one single moment; but still no well-bred mouse pretends to be aware that there are cats, and still less terriers.

"Dogs are bad enough; but, thank goodness," said honest John Bright-eyes, "they have the manners to bark before they attack one, and

then it is not so difficult to get out of their way, especially as they become so excited they don't always see distinctly where one is hiding; but cats—ugh! They never give the least warning of their presence, but creep about in the quietest way, and you know nothing whatever until you feel a paw with sharp hooks in it, stuck right in the middle of your back."

Mr. Bright-eyes said all this at his club. He would not have dared to speak so openly before his wife and daughters; and he managed to make even all the old-fogey mice, who were sitting round their walnuts and train-oil, quite nervous and low-spirited. They had no heart to stay and discuss the dreadful scarcity of crumbs, or the probable rise in grains, but each one looked nervously over his shoulder, and said, "Well, good-night; I think I'll be going now. I promised my wife I would come home early to-night," and scurried off to their holes as fast as possible.

Mr. Bright-eyes was rather apt to say these unpleasant things, and as he too had come home early that night his wife took the opportunity of speaking seriously to him on the subject.

"I shall never forgive you, John, if you say anything to disperse the company. It would be too bad after the pains I have taken about the supper and all; and dear Bruna is as nervous as nervous can be. You see Fred Friskett is rather fat for his age, and certainly very imprudent. In fact, he is quite an unbeliever in—ahem; so I don't wonder at her being timid, poor child."

"You don't mean to say he is such a fool as to say there's no such thing," cried old Bright-eyes.

"I would not go so far as that," answered his wife, for she began to fear that Bruna's father might object at the last moment to her marrying a mouse who was not well up to all the dangers of existence. "Fred certainly is a little rash, but then Bruna is cautious enough for two."

"Oh, well, if she likes to take care of him as well as herself, I cannot help it," said the father-mouse, curling his tail well round his ears, and settling himself to sleep in a nice little heap of fluff and wool collected by his wife during their honeymoon from an old mattrass in the lumber-room.

There had been a great discussion in the Bright-eyes family as to whether the wedding supper should take place in the night or the day. Of course in the day disagreeable four-footed creatures were more apt to be asleep, but then there would be such lots and lots of great noisy boys and girls about.

"For my part," said Bruna, who was allowed to speak her mind on this occasion, "I would as soon see a—anything, I mean, as a boy; one is quite as bad as the other; and do you know, mother," she continued quite solemnly, as if she really did not expect to be believed, "I actually saw an old lady—that one who is so fat, and

looks as if she lived on nothing but candle-ends—jump up on a high table the other day. Yes, you may laugh; it is quite true. The maid had just taken away the breakfast things, and the room was so quiet I peeped out."

"Bruna, Bruna, what were you doing down stairs?" asked her mother severely.

Bruna blushed a little, as a mouse blushes. I don't know how exactly, but I daresay they do it. Well, at all events she blushed, and said, "Oh, it's all right, Mamma dear! I was very careful. It was two mornings ago, when Fred saw me home from that delightful ball in the loft, and you and Papa went upstairs so quickly that I lost sight of you; and as there were some noises about, Fred and I just darted into the hole by the sideboard. He didn't stay a minute, you know; and as I said, I saw this old lady—she had pink ribbons in her cap that morning—jump right actually up on the table, as actively as I could; and all because I slipped out of

the hole and picked up a tiny bit of toast which the maid had dropped. I am sure I did not make a breath of noise, and she frightened me almost to death by crackling her newspaper. I was back in my hole, I can promise you, before you could say 'whiskers;' but I could not help peeping out at her, she looked so ridiculous, bundled up on the shiny table, screaming and velling as if a-a-something dreadful was after her. Such a lot of people came running, and some one said, 'I thought you were on fire, Gran'ma;' and that tiresome boy Ralph called out, as if it was the best fun in the world, 'Oh, let's fetch the---' When I heard that, of course I did as you told me to do in such a case. I went to the furthermost end of the hole, and lay as still as if I were dead. It was lucky I had snatched up that bit of toast, though, for it really was not safe to come up here until quite evening, when everybody had gone out for a walk."

"Other things are fond of going out for a walk, too, at that very hour," observed her mother severely; but seeing that Bruna's little whiskers were twitching sensitively, and that she looked as if she were going to cry, she added more cheerfully, "Never mind, dear; you must not fret, you know, because it may make your coat stare or your whiskers limp, and I want you to look your best this evening. Come here, and let me lick you a little; running so fast is apt to make one's coat rough."

That was the way Bruna's mamma dressed her for her wedding. She licked and licked her pretty soft fur until it shone like a brown satin rock; then she went a little way off, and looked at her, and said, "You will do very nicely, I think. Just point your tail the least bit more—so. It gives such grace to one's movements if one carries one's tail straight, and I used to be famous for my grace when I was your age."

Mrs. Bright-eyes sighed a little as she said this,

for it must be very dreadful when you have to say those things for yourself. I notice that my young pretty aunts, Aunt Lucy or Aunt Totty, never talk about what teeth, or eyes, or hair, they used to have. Now Aunt Charlotte, and Aunt Elizabeth, and all Papa's sisters are always saying to me, "Ethel is very like what I used to be at her age. Ah! I've heard our poor mother say I used to be such a pretty child." They aren't pretty now, and I do hope I shall not be exactly like that when I am old.

Well, at all events, that was what Mrs. Brighteyes said, and perhaps Bruna may have thought it foolish just as I do, but she was a nice little mouse, and gave her mamma a kiss with her sharp nose, and darted off downstairs, through all the passages, and across the farmyard till she got to the Granary. Mrs. Bright-eyes followed quite as cautiously, but more soberly; and when she, too, arrived at the ballroomdoor, she found Fred Friskett looking as spruce

as you please, talking nonsense to Bruna behind an empty sack.

When he saw his mother-in-law coming, he went forward to meet her, and said, "I've kept such a nice safe place for you, Mrs. Bright-eyes. There is a large hole which leads into the carthouse just behind it; allow me to hand you to it." So he put out his paw, like this, and conducted the old lady to the corner he had kept for her. Bruna liked to see her mouse-lover behaving so kindly to her mother, and she whisked her tail very graciously at him when he returned.

In the middle of the ball Bruna and Fred Friskett were married by old Mr. Bright-eyes, who merely said, "Take her, my boy, and be happy; but look here, there are, there really are, you know, in the world such things as ——"

"John, John," screamed his wife, "you promised me you wouldn't;" but all the same she darted into the hole behind her, and the entire company, who had left off dancing and been standing round in a circle to see the ceremony, vanished behind bags of corn, or climbed up into the rafters. As for Bruna, she was so surprised and terrified that she never stopped scampering till she got right up into the thatch. When she could get no farther, and was miles out of the reach of any cat (I am not a mouse, you know, so I need not mind saying it), she thought of Fred, and looked round. To her horror there he was standing right in the middle of the floor, exactly where the moonbeams made the brightest spot. Old Mr. Bright-eyes stood there too, scratching his ear with his paw, and looking all round in a helpless and bewildered manner.

"What have I done? What have I said? What is the matter?" he asked Fred over and over again.

"I don't know, I'm sure, sir," Fred replied, licking his nose in the most unconcerned way. "The company seems nervous to-night."

"Oh, Fred, Fred, you will break my heart!" sobbed poor little Bruna from her high perch. "Do come here, and be quiet."

"I will come anywhere you wish, my love," answered the bridegroom very politely; and he sprang on a low beam, and ran up a rafter, and so into the thatch where Bruna was hiding. I believe she spoke to him very seriously about his new duties as a married mouse, and made him promise not to be so careless of his precious, precious head: "They always scrunch that first," she said, with a shudder.

"Don't be foolish, my pretty darling," said Fred; "I'd like to see any——"

"Now, Fred!" she shricked; "do you wish to break my heart?"

"Certainly not, my dear," he replied caressingly; "I only meant that I should like to see anyone scrunching this lovely head," and he gave her a little kiss.

"Don't be ridiculous, sir; see, there's Mamma

coming out of her hole! It must be quite safe now. Let's have one more good dance from one end of the floor to the other, and then we'll go to supper: I declare I am getting quite hungry."

So they came down, Bruna looking about very carefully, turning her head first to one side and then to the other, and making a little dart forward, like this. Then she stopped and looked sharply round out of her big black eyes, and made another little rush, and so on. Still she remembered what her mamma had said about grace, and carried her tail in the most fascinating way. Fred thought her quite enchanting, and told her so as soon as ever they took their places for the dance.

In the meantime Mrs. Bright-eyes had succeeded in quieting the fears of the wedding guests. She smiled very sweetly on them, and said, "It was all my fault. I drank some rather strong coffee this morning, and I really am so

nervous. I cannot imagine how I came to be so absurd." But every time she passed old Bright-eyes she gave him such a look, "glared at him like a cat," as he afterwards said quite boldly, without caring for his manners. Once or twice she whispered as she passed him, giving a whisk with her tail which expressed more temper than grace, "I hope you are satisfied;" or else, "Monster! at your own daughter's wedding;" or some remark of that sort. This conduct at last made John so wretched that he toddled off to his club, where he found only a few old bachelor mice, and they played games with oat-husks until the daylight came and it was time to go to bed.

In the meanwhile Bruna had got up a famous country dance: of course she led off with her bridegroom, and they looked a very nice young couple. Fred Friskett exerted himself immensely, and turned and twisted in a way which was simply surprising when you consider that he did not

like dancing, and was rather fat. Bruna took sweet little steps first to this side, and then to that, turning round and round once or twice, and then gallopading right across the floor at such a pace. Oh, dear! it takes one's breath away, I can tell you, and young Friskett thought to himself: "Well, this is the last time; I do hope Bruna won't make me dance like this every moonlight night."

He felt exceedingly glad as he sat up on his hind-legs, looking quite exhausted, and mopping his head with his paw, when his mother-in-law came up to him, and said, "Fred, my dear, will you take Bruna in to supper? She knows where it is laid out; and, let me whisper—do, pray, be very careful. There have been such shocking affairs, quite lately. Think of Bruna; you have her safety to look out for now as well as your own," and she patted him playfully with her paw.

"All right, Mrs. Bright-eyes, I'll be as sharp

as a rose-prickle," said Fred, who was rather poetical; "come along, Bruna."

So they all followed the pretty little brown bride and bridegroom down the hand-rail of the granary staircase (which was a much quicker way than the steps), across the yard again. This part of the journey was very nervous work, and Bruna gave many little squeals of alarm as thev scurried along. You see the moon was thinking of going to bed, for it was getting late;—or was it that it was getting early? That's really very difficult to settle, if you think of it. Never mind; whichever it was, the haystacks made great, deep shadows of an inky blackness, and, as on the whole it seemed safer to keep near the stacks, there was nothing for it but to make a rush and get past them as fast as possible. I should have shut my eyes, I know I should, but Bruna dared not do such a thing, for that stupid Fred Friskett chose that time to tease her-so tiresome, you know. When a big rat looked out from

beneath a stack. Bruna used to make him a low curtsey, like this, and slide past; for that is what well-brought-up young lady mice do if they pass a rat. But Fred, who was a shocking rad—rad—kle, would stick his hind foot up in the air, so, as a sign of impertinence; and once he forgot himself so far as to try to mew under the very nose of the famous Grev Rat. the oldest inhabitant of the farm-yard. Bruna really could not stand this; it was so unfeeling and rude. She forgot all her caution, and even the danger, and paused right in the full light. Fred felt rather frightened, I can tell you, when Bruna looked at him like that. It was so exactly the way Mrs. Bright-eyes glared at poor old John when he made a blunder.

"Mr. Friskett," said Bruna, severely, "if ever you do such a thing again, we part."

That was all she said; but it made Fred know directly that he was married, and he did not even wish to say anything pert, or argue, but

merely remarked, "Certainly not, my dear, if you don't wish it," and ran along quite soberly by his wife's side, glancing at her now and then to see if she was still angry. But I am sorry to say, though he looked so meek, he was thinking to himself all the time, "I wonder if old Brighteyes could get me into his club! I'll ask him presently. Or there's the Singing Mouse's Hole, that's a jolly place, I believe, and one can say what one likes there."

Now, if Bruna could have guessed what thoughts were passing through her bridegroom's heart, she would have cried her bright, round eyes out; but she didn't know, of course, and only felt what a good beginning she had made, and how true it was what her mamma had said, that one was obliged to be firm with one's husband. "Poor Fred, he didn't mean any harm; it's only that his high spirits carry him away at times. Perhaps I was too severe," she thought; and smiled sweetly at him, making little noses, so, like this.

I've seen mice move their noses up and down that way, and it looked very pretty. Fred felt comforted, but he didn't give up the idea of the club, though.

At last they reached the kitchen, and there all the company paused—under shelter, of course, in an empty flour-barrel—until Mrs. Bright-eyes came to the front. She soon arrived, rather out of breath, but full of politeness, and very anxious that Bruna should see how these things ought to be managed, for, who knows? she might be the mistress of a similar feast some day herself. Well, as I was saying, she came forward, which is a very trying thing for a mouse to do, for they generally prefer getting as much behind each other as possible, and she waved her tail towards a large hole in the storeroom door.

"What! in there?" murmured the guests, very softly, for it didn't do to speak loud, you know. It certainly seemed very rash, because every single mouse in the company knew what that hole was

cut on purpose for, and it really seemed like walking into a—the other thing. However, Mrs. Bright-eyes smiled, and led the way, gliding as softly as a moonbeam, and looking back as brave as a rat over her shoulder at her huddled-up guests. Of course, then, there was nothing for it but to follow the hostess, which they all did as silently and swiftly as possible.

When once they got in, they all felt very glad they had come. Such a wedding-supper as old Mother Bright-eyes had got together! How she had managed it nobody knew, for many of the things had been put on the highest shelves, and even in jars and horrid things with lids to them, yet there they were, and in the greatest abundance too. Grains of rice in a nice little heap in one corner, sago in another; a large piece of cheese-rind, which it must have taken at least three mice to fetch, was in the middle, just like a joint, whilst four fine almonds made the side dishes. Then there were raisins and

candle-ends, and apple-parings, and bits of biscuit. and some oatmeal, and, strange to say, a large piece of real people's wedding-cake. You know Cook said. "Them imperent mice got at Miss T'resa's wedding-cake, actially," so that was what they did, and there was a good big bit, as large as—as—well as large as a walnut, I daresay. That would be quite big enough for a mouse, I should think; and Bruna sat opposite to it, and Fred Friskett next to her, for they soon made up their little quarrel; and each mouse nibbled away as hard and as fast as ever it could. We needn't eat like that, thank goodness; but I daresay we should, if we thought a lion or a tiger would spring out on us perhaps the next minute. It is good manners in mice to eat very fast, so they all ate away until every bit of the supper had been nibbled up, not the tin—tiniest crumb left.

They had been sitting, I must tell you, in a curious fashion. No mouse could have been persuaded to have turned round its back to that large hole at the bottom of the door for all the wealth of the storeroom, so they arranged themselves in an odd kind of a half-circle, with the bit of real wedding-cake right in the middle, just here, and the bride and bridegroom exactly opposite. That was really the post of danger, if you think of it, but it was the post of honour too; so giddy young Friskett thought only of the honour, whilst Bruna kept her eyes, and ears, and whiskers all on the alert for the least little scent or sound of danger.

One grumpy old mouse had proposed that Mrs. Bright-eyes should sit where the bridal couple had been placed, saying he thought those foolish young mice might be looking at each other instead of at the hole. But the company would not hear of this: it would be so completely against all custom; and Mrs. Bright-eyes whispered to her neighbour, "I have every confidence in dear Bruna, she has *such* a nose for her age, and her ears are the sharpest in the whole loft; everyone will tell

you the same. Ah! it is a great trial to me. losing her; and then the granary is not exactly what she has been accustomed to dear child: but she would do it, and now one can only hope she'll be happy, and that that terrible monster with the creatures in a bag-those fearful white beasts with red eyes, I mean-who came the summer I was married, won't disturb us for some time. But it's a weary world, dear Mrs. Four-paws-isn't it, now?" And the poor old mother-mouse actually winked her wide-open, bead-like eyes. She had been drinking a good deal of treacle, which was oozing, in the most convenient way, out of a tin can standing in one corner, and it was rather strong and had got into her head, so she said more than was strictly proper.

The feast had quite disappeared, and the cuckoo-clock had cuckooed more than once. The first time that happened the company ran away, but they didn't mind it after once or twice. The old Frisketts had often asked Fred to go

to the hole and look out; that was instead of saying, "Would you just see if my carriage is there, please? Oh, thank you so much!" But Fred was not fond of retiring early behind his cornsack, so he said, "Don't go yet, Mother; we are just going to have some fun; here's Mademoiselle Musa, who has such an extraordinary voice, is going to oblige us with a song."

Now everybody felt this was a very awkward thing to say, and old Mrs. Bright-eyes looked at Bruna as much as to ask, "Why do you let him?" and Bruna made a nose, and shook her ears impatiently, as much as to answer, "How can I help it?" For, you see, it was just this. Of course Mademoiselle Musa was a great wonder, and every mouse would give whole corn-ricks to hear her, but still—other creatures might hear her too, and come to see what was the matter; for nothing is so rare as a singing mouse, and they nearly always get caught and made prisoners for life, if even they escape scrunching. So a voice is not a thing

which is encouraged in the mouse-world, where silence is so important. Still it was too late to stop now, for the young lady—she wasn't so very young either, but she wouldn't hear of being more than three, though she was really six months old—had already begun to give little coughs—like this. The treacle must have made Mrs. Four-paws, who was the quietest mouse in the whole world, very brave, for she actually said—

"Stay a moment, dear Mademoiselle; wouldn't it be as well if I, or some other mouse, just peeped outside the hole and saw that all was right?"

"As you please," said the Singing Mouse, coldly, for she did not like to be stopped in her little coughs. So Mrs. Four-paws said, "Come along, my dear," and both she and Mrs. Bright-eyes went, paw-in-paw, to the hole and through it, and even a little way beyond, right into the kitchen—for there's nothing makes one so brave as treacle.

They came back quite smooth and smiling;

not in the least hurry, but as if they were quite unconcerned.

"It's all right," they said. "It is in a box with some hay, and it has got four hideous little wretches like its horrid self; but it is so taken up with them that it has not eyes or ears for anything else. Besides which, you'll all be happy to hear that a large saucer of milk, with bits of meat in it, has been placed inside—yes, actually inside—the box, so It has food for its mind and body, and is as safe as possible. Still, dear Mademoiselle, still it is better to be prudent, and give us something very quiet; a little simple ballad, you know."

Mademoiselle didn't like this, but she pretended not to mind, and after pensively stroking her whiskers, began thus:

"Oh who would not be
A mouse so free,
O'er lofts and shelves to roam;
Without a care
To make him stare,
And a sweet little wife at home?"

Chorus, ladies and gentlemen, if you please:

"At home, at home,
To welcome him home,
A sweet little wife at home!"

Fred Friskett, who had also been drinking a good deal of treacle, I am sorry to say, thought this such a beautiful sentiment, that he quite lost his head, and squealed—for he could not sing a note—as loud as any lady. Even Bruna seemed pleased, and didn't hate Mademoiselle for being able to sing, nearly so much as she had done a few minutes ago. She didn't feel a bit jealous, either, when Fred rapped with his tail and cried—

"That's exquisite; go on, Mademoiselle, pray do."

Mademoiselle gave another little cough, and looked up to the rows of jam-pots, and then started off again:—

"In danger or woe
Homeward we'll go,
For safety oft lies in a loft;

And should famine betide, We'll share with our bride Whate'er is yet left in the croft."

Chorus, ladies and gentlemen, if you please:-

"The croft, the croft,
The ever-filled croft,
Whate'er is yet left in the croft."

"Really, Bruna will be a very happy mouse," thought her mother, licking her paws, for she was ashamed to go for some more treacle.

Bruna was thinking so too, her own self, whilst everybody else was paying Mademoiselle compliments, and begging her to try and remember something else—"that sweet thing from 'Mouseiana,' you know;" and the Singing Mouse felt quite happy, for was not everyone thinking of her, and looking at her? No one minded the hole, and Fred Friskett had just whispered to Bruna, "We'll ask her to come and stay with us, and perhaps she may give you lessons;" and Bruna had whispered back, in a sobbing voice, "Why did

you want to marry me when you knew I couldn't sing? I'm sure I don't want to learn from her; horrid creature! her fur is all coming off in patches;" when,—between the wedding guests and the hole, half in and half out, a great big tabby head appeared, with large shining yellow eyes. She made a sound which you or I would have thought was only a mew, but to every mouse's ear it shouted, "Paws and claws! what have we here?"

Well, dreadful and terrible as such a sight must always be to mice, still it was not so bad as usual. Puss was in an uncommonly good temper, I can tell you, or she wouldn't have mewed, or looked through the hole, or anything. She would just have made one spring without saying a word, and there'd have been scrunching. But what with her four babies, which nobody knew about yet, and what with having drank all the milk in the saucer, she felt too happy to care for catching mice just then, and merely remarked a second



time, "What have we here?" By the time she said this, however, nobody was there—not a mouse. Even those who had been drinking the treacle felt suddenly as if there was no such thing in the world; whilst Bruna and the Friskett family fled like mad mice into the very depths of a sack of flour. The dreadful thing was, however, that nobody could get out of the storeroom, for all the convenient little holes in the skirting boards, by which mice could get away, had been stopped up that very morning.

There was nothing for it but to hide and trust to Pussy's not knowing about the stopped-up holes (which she didn't, by the way). Consequently, when the company dispersed in this sudden manner, she only licked her lips, and opened and shut her claws, so, and said: "It isn't worth while to flurry myself by running after them; besides, I have other things to think about. I'll just step round and ask old Mother Tabby if nine days is the soonest the kittens can possibly open their

eyes; that red one really seems to me to be thinking about it already. He is so forward; but indeed they all seem wonderfully clever and intelligent, and I'm sure they're very handsome." You see Mrs. Puss was luckily full of her own concerns, and not a bit hungry, so she went away to pay Mrs. Tabby, who lived in the stable, a visit.

After a time, which appeared a long and weary while to the poor little trembling mice, first one and then another peeped out. If we had been there we'd have seen a little head popping from behind a box, like this, and then another pair of bright eyes glancing down from a high shelf. At length Mrs. Bright-eyes, feeling that it was her duty, as she gave the party, whispered "Now!" and then, I am sorry to say, without stopping to bid good-night to her guests, or to give Bruna good advice, or even to ask Fred whether he still thought there were no such things as cats in the world, she whisked off like a flash of lightning through the kitchen, across the hall, up the stairs,

and into the loft, where she found honest old John snugly tucked into his wool nest.

- "Nothing the matter, eh?" he asked, drowsily.
- "Oh no, nothing worth mentioning! I'll tell you all about it in the morning."

"Well, good-night, my dear; you seem to have come upstairs rather in a hurry, that's all." So he tucked his nose in among the loose wool, and went off to sleep.

The Frisketts and Bruna got home, too, quite safely, though Bruna thought she would have died of fear as she glided across the place where the cat had stood watching them. It was really quite overpowering, the horrible odour there, and Bruna said, more than once, "I am going to faint, Fred: I know I shall." Fred behaved very well. He kept close beside his little bride, and they reached the granary quite safely, and lived happily ever after.

CHAPTER V.

CHATTY'S ADVENTURES.

THERE never, never was such a boy for adventures as Chatty. That was not his real name, of course, but we always called him Chatty. His mamma told my mamma that he was christened Charteris; so Charteris White must have been his own real name, but that is much too long to call a boy always. Chatty was his pet name, and I think it is just a nice comfortable length.

Well, Master Chatty was for ever and ever looking out for adventures. When he was quite a little boy, instead of asking for a story or a fairy tale, or anything of that kind, he always begged for a true story of adventures, and as he

grew older and came downstairs oftener, he used to rush up to any strange lady or gentleman who came to see his mamma and papa, and say, "Oh, have you had any adventures?" His father used often to tell him that when he grew up he would be sure to have plenty of adventures of his own; but Chatty thought that was far too long to wait, and that he would like to have some then, while he was still a little boy.

Every day when he went out for a walk he used to say, "I do hope I shall have an adventure to-day," but he never could find any, because, you know, there are not a great many adventures in England.

Sometimes he used to act adventures, and pretend that he was Robinson Crusoe; but he got into great trouble about that. Where do you think he had his desert island? In the housemaid's closet, under the stairs, and he played that he was shipwrecked, and that it was a cold, dark night, and that he must light a fire. Of course it was both cold and dark in such a nasty, damp hole as that—I should not like to play there—but the silly boy found some paper, and matches, and wood, and he went and lighted a big fire. Luckily it was on the stones, but soon there was such a smoke that Chatty was nearly smothered. Everybody smelt it, and heard the wood crackling, and came running to see where the fire could possibly be, and there was Master Chatty, blinking his eyes very much, for the smoke made them smart a good deal, and gasping, and saying, "I wonder what Robinson Crusoe did with his smoke?" His papa was very angry, and told him he had nearly set the house on fire, and that he really must not play desert islands any more indoors.

Then he got into trouble by taking all his sisters' dolls—he had three sisters, and they each had a lot of dolls—and making them lean up in a row against the garden wall and catapulting

them until they had not one single nose left amongst them all. Of course he battered their cheeks, and knocked out their eyes too, but the noses were the worst. He would not leave off for a long time, because he declared he was a wild Indian out on the war-path, and that there were some Pale-faces who were going to take him prisoner. Fancy dolls trying to catch a boy! It was such nonsense, you know. But he never stopped until he had taken all the dolls' wigs off, and he marched in to luncheon with what he called their scalps, hanging to his belt. Just think what I should say if Rudolph was to treat Josephine or Alberta, or the new doll which has no name yet, in that way! It must have been horrid for Chatty's sisters, and they cried, and begged their papa to send the boy quite far away. Chatty did not mind their doing so, for he longed to go away from home to a place where he could find some real adventures. I believe he would have liked a country where there were lions and tigers, but his papa said, "No, he was not big enough for that yet," and he sent him to sea with a captain who was a friend of his. It wasn't a ship belonging to the Queen, which she keeps to fight her enemies with, but a peaceable ship, to carry things to other places to sell. A very big ship, though, with lots of sailors on board, like that one I saw the other day when I went with Uncle Tom to get those large boxes which he said were in the hold, and which turned out to have so many funny things inside them.

I should think a ship like that would be sure to go to plenty of places where there would be adventures. Chatty thought so too, and he was very glad to go on board her (ships are always she's, Uncle Tom says). They sailed away, and sailed away, until they came to such a curious country. I don't know rightly where it could have been, but it was a long, long way off. They cast anchor—that's what a ship does when she

wants to stop-and Chatty asked leave to go on shore. "Yes." said the captain. "you may go. but take care not to lose yourself, or strange things will happen to you." Well, you know, that was exactly what Chatty wanted, and had wished for all his life; but he didn't tell the captain so: he merely remarked, "Ay, ay, sir," (that's what sailors say to the captain), and went into his cabin to get his things. He tried very hard to remember what he had always heard people wanted for adventures, but he could only think of his knife. Of course he took that, and his catapult, and some rope and some biscuit, and a little wine. He could not recollect anything else he might want, except a fowling-piece. Adventures always have a fowling-piece in them, but Chatty did not quite know what it meant any more than I do, so he did not take one.

The sea was very rough as they rowed towards the shore, and the boat bobbed up and down a good deal, but at last they got to land, and Chatty jumped out, and went off to look for adventures. He had not gone far, when he met a savage: such a curious man; brown, with clothes made of feathers and skins, just like real savages. I don't know how they managed about the language, because savages do not always speak English, but perhaps this one did. Yes, I think this one did, or else how could Chatty have understood him? They made signs, too; for there are generally signs in adventures; but at all events, they got on very well. He was a nice, good savage, and didn't want to eat Chatty, or anything of that kind.

"What are you doing here?" the brown man asked, shaking his tomahawk,

Chatty thought that was rather like an ogre's question, but he was a very brave boy, and answered boldly, "Adventures!" and took out his knife and opened all the blades, and the corkscrew, and even the button-hook, so that the savage might see he was well armed. Now, you

know, the savage had never seen a knife before—how could he? and this was really a wonderful knife, just like the one Papa gave Oswald on his birthday, and which Oswald lost out ferreting the very next day—so he danced round it, and made a sort of bow every now and then, like this, and took a large red feather out of his head-dress, and laid it at Chatty's feet, to show he took him for his master. Chatty liked being anyone's master very much, even a savage's, and he picked up the feather, and stuck it in his straw hat, to show he was willing to be friendly, and said—

"Lead on. I want to see some adventures!"

"What shall we do, little master?" asked the poor savage; "shall we look for crocodiles, or shoot eagles, or else shall we go and make war upon the monkeys?"

Now Chatty had always longed and longed to have a pet monkey, but his mamma would not let him. He thought to himself, directly, how delightful it would be if he could catch a monkey, and tame it, and bring it home again in the ship. So he said to the savage. "Monkeys first," because he meant to go after the eagles and crocodiles too, if there should be time. It was very lucky he had his catapult, I can tell you, for no sooner had they entered the wood where the monkeys lived, than a shower of nuts, something like walnuts, which grew upon the trees, rattled fast and loudly about their ears. At this the savage threw himself flat upon his face, and began saying his prayers in gibberish. You can't always understand everything they say, you know, especially when they pray to their idols, as this one was doing. Chatty advised him to get up, and even ordered him to do so; but no, the savage would not stir, he was so frightened. So as by this time the great big nuts were pelting Chatty pretty hard, he thought it was high time to defend himself, and he drew out his knife, and first of all opened the large hookthat thing which goes over the other things at the back.

Well, he fancied that, of course, the monkeys would all be as frightened as the poor savage had been, and would at once stop pelting, and take him for their master: but they didn't do anything of the kind-not they. Certainly, the nuts did not come down quite so fast, but that was because the monkeys were all laughing, not at him, but at one old monkey with a very wrinkled face and a grey beard. This animal was a sort of chief over the others, and always took the lead in monkey affairs. He stared very hard at Chatty and at his knife, and then he deliberately put his paw behind him, brought his long tail round in front, and held it up as Chatty was holding his knife, crooking the end of it so as to make it look exactly like the hook. Chatty felt very angry when he saw this, for he knew then that the monkeys were laughing at him—at least the big one was—and had not

purpose. And it all came thro down. One evening, at the beg summer, Dame Gurgles bade Jon something out of the tool-hous to be near Growler's kennel. Jon natured boy, and always ready his mother, or anybody else. S dame called out, "Just go and with the string round it, Joe, the Joe set off, best pace. But alth really dark, nor anything like Growler's long chain stretched yard, for Growler himself had con kennel and was gnawing a bone a chain would let him get. However the chain, so he caught his foot in came, flat on his face, with a dread paved yard. That was bad enough worse when Growler flew at him snap, and bit the piece right trouser and all,-not a very big

ong tails, and swung themly-backwards and forwards their joy and triumph, and k. flinging more nuts, as hard hey could. Chatty began to easy to catch a pet monkey, d brought his umbrella with the nuts; but as he put his his pocket, he suddenly felt there, in that very pocket, d a nut deliberately into itped to see what he was doing, to know how everything is -and he took aim right at It did not hit him in the m the forehead, and knocked the branch, and he came topr heels, right to the ground. till, Chatty ventured to go up his eyes were shut. He his long tail, and wound it any idea of taking him for their master as the savage had done; still it was not much use being the master of a person who lay down and gabbled nonsense when any danger came; was it now?

But Chatty determined to try the effect of something else, so he opened the corkscrew, and held it up with a terrible frown, as much as to say, "Make your tail into this, if you can!" The old monkey did try, actually; he took hold of the end of his tail and twisted it, like a curl, but it would not stay twisted, and he had to give it up. He was determined to tease Chatty, however, so he made a sort of hook with his finger, so, and put it inside his cheek, and then pulled it out quickly, with a "plop," just as if he were drawing a cork! It was really too bad, you know, and Chatty could not think where the monkey had learned to do such a thing.

However, there was no time to stand staring there, for when the monkeys saw that their chief had, as it were, vanquished Chatty, they all

hung on by their long tails, and swung themselves-oh, so quickly-backwards and forwards five times, to express their joy and triumph, and then they set to work, flinging more nuts, as hard and as fast as ever they could. Chatty began to think it was not so easy to catch a pet monkey, and he wished he had brought his umbrella with him, on account of the nuts; but as he put his knife back again into his pocket, he suddenly felt that his catapult was there, in that very pocket. He drew it out, fitted a nut deliberately into itall the monkeys stopped to see what he was doing, for they always want to know how everything is done, Miss Kirke says-and he took aim right at the old monkey's eye. It did not hit him in the eye, but just here, on the forehead, and knocked him backwards off the branch, and he came toppling down, head over heels, right to the ground.

As he lay quite still, Chatty ventured to go up to him, and saw that his eyes were shut. He immediately seized his long tail, and wound it tightly round and round his body, fastening his arms down to his sides. Chatty then tied the end with a piece of string—for boys always carry bits of string in their pockets—and so he had the old monkey safe as a prisoner. Presently the monkey opened his eyes—no, he didn't speak; I am afraid monkeys never do speak, even in adventures but he made signs. He shut his eyes again, and turned his head on one side, like this, with a very sorrowful look, as much as to say, "I am very bad, you have hurt me dreadfully;" and Chatty said, "Why did you make fun of me, then?" You know, monkeys can hear and understand, if they can't speak. The old monkey made more signs, as much as to say, "I was only in fun; pray, pray forgive me." So Chatty could not help laughing, and forgave him; but before he untied him, he said, "I want one of your very nicest monkeys to come down and belong to me as my very own, that I may take it away in the ship back to my own home."

At this the monkey looked angry, and made ugly faces, and shook his head; but Chatty said, "Very well, then; I'll catapult you until I get one;" and he picked up another walnut, and fitted it into his catapult. All the other monkeys cried out when they saw that, because they were fond of their brave old chief, who would rather be hit himself than give up one of his children for a boy's pet, to sail away in a ship. Chatty did not want to hit the old monkey either, and waited to see what the others would do.

They jabbered and chatted a great deal, but presently four or five nice monkeys came sliding and slithering down the smooth trunks of the tall trees, and stood in a row before him, showing him that he was to choose one. They all looked somewhat wretched, because they did not want to leave their beautiful wood and all their relations and friends, but still they would rather go than be catapulted. One of them was such a sweet little thing, exactly like that monkey I saw at the Zoological

Gardens when I went with Aunt Totty. Its fur was a sort of bright copper colour, and it had a wee black face, and such tiny black paws, and great, sad-looking eyes, and a yellow beard, like a fringe, all round its funny, wistful little face. Oh, it was such a pet! and Chatty chose that one directly, and made signs that he was going to be very kind to it. He put it carefully inside his jacket, the way he had seen organ-grinders do: then he went and untied the old monkey's tail, and said, "Good bye, old fellow; don't go and throw nuts at people, or make fun of their knives, you know, or else you'll get catapulted all to pieces." I don't think the old monkey quite understood what he meant, but he walked on all four legs and arms together, something like this, slowly and sorrowfully away.

Chatty then went up to the savage, who kept knocking the ground with his forehead, and showed him the little monkey snug and warm inside his jacket. The savage was greatly delighted, and jumped up and kicked over his idol, and made signs that it was all right now. He evidently wanted to roast and eat the small monkey, and pointed first to his mouth and then to Chatty's, and said, "Make fire: bake him in mud: very good supper;" or something like that; but Chatty could not think of allowing such a thing, and shook his head. "If you're hungry, come and let us catch an eagle," said the bold boy, for by this time he was getting so used to adventures that he thought no more of catching an eagle than I should do of asking nurse for a biscuit if I were hungry.

The savage did not mind showing Chatty the way, but I am sorry to say he behaved just as badly as ever when they reached the spot. It was an awful place, that's certain. On a great high rock, sticking up out of a mountain, with a deep, deep river rushing and foaming below, the eagle had built its nest. Luckily Chatty could climb very well, nearly as well as Oswald, who can get up anywhere; so he soon scrambled up the rocks,

holding on here and there by a bush, or tuft of grass, with the savage close behind him, saying, "Well done, massa;"—savages always say "massa," and it sounds better. But when they came to the nest itself it was so dreadful that even Chatty wished they had gone to look for a chicken or some smaller bird for their supper, and he remembered that people did not generally eat eagles.

It was too late, however, to turn back, and the precipice looked even worse from above than it did from below. So Chatty said boldly to the savage, "Lead on," and took out his knife once more. This time he opened the great saw blade, and flourished it over his head. Now, it was great nonsense to say "Lead on," because they were then already at the very tip-top of the rock, and could not possibly get any higher; but, as I said before, it was a very terrible place, and perhaps Chatty wanted to get away from it. Not only were there three young eagles, with their heads thrown back, and their huge beaks wide open, like this, but there

were feathers, and skins, and bones. thought some of the bones looked uncommonly like little boys' arms and legs with all the flesh neatly picked off them, but he could not be sure. Ugh, it was horrid! For my part, I am not at all surprised at the savage's conduct. He just glanced round, saw a great heap of feathers in one corner of the dreadful nest, and he scrambled into it, hiding his head and shoulders, so that no one could see anything except his legs, which were protected by mocassins. Miss Kirke says those are things Indians wear on their legs—or is it their feet? Never mind; this savage was, perhaps, an Indian; at all events, he'd got a pair of mocassins, and they looked very smart on his legs, which stuck out from his hiding-place.

Chatty thought to himself, "How about the shooting? Didn't the savage say we were to shoot these eagles? I don't see any gun about." But he had his catapult, though, and fitting a large, loose stone into its socket, he let fly right down

the young eagle's throat. It did not mind it one bit; just gave a great gulp, so, and opened its mouth again wide as if it had swallowed one sugarplum and wanted another. Clearly a catapult was no use; but there was the knife. Chatty tried to saw one of the young eagle's heads off, but after sawing away for some time the creature put up its claw and scratched the place, as if it only tickled it to be sawed, and not a drop of blood came.

In the mean time the little monkey had been peeping out at things in general from the shelter of Chatty's jacket, and it now thought the time had come for it to help its new master, who was almost at his wits' end. This monkey was particularly clever, and knew exactly how to fight eagles, so he made signs to Chatty to ask if he had such a thing as a little salt about him. Luckily he had most luckily, I may say; because no sooner had the monkey sprinkled a pinch of salt upon each of the young eagles' tails—very stumpy little tails they were, too—than they shut up their



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beaks, tucked their heads under their ridiculous wings, and went off to sleep, exactly as if they had had the most delicious supper in the world, and were going to bed like three good children. Really that salt it was quite magical, and I don't at all wonder that people tell one to use it; but the birds I try it on won't sit still for me to sprinkle it properly, as these did. Hardly had the young eagles been quieted in this delightful way, than with a rush, and a scream, and a whirr, the great mamma-eagle flew into the nest.

It was an awful moment; she looked hard at Chatty with her bright, fierce eyes, and he felt directly that if the young eagles had not been so very comfortable and happy it would have gone hard with him. She did not take any notice of the monkey, though it was watching her sharply all the time. Her eyes were so bright, and clear, and unwinking, that Chatty made her a bow, so. You can't bow very well in a nest, with feathers and bones all about your feet: still, he made her a bow,

but he felt rather ashamed of himself, as if he had been telling a fib, in fact. You see it was plain the mamma-eagle thought Chatty had kindly given her children a good supper all round, and put them to bed for her, whereas the real fact was, that one of them had a big stone inside it, and the other a little mark on its bare throat, where he had been trying to saw its head off. "If she finds that out," thought Chatty; but the young eagles had their heads tucked away out of sight, and were sleeping sweetly.

Just at this moment the eagle caught sight of the savage's leg sticking out from the heap of feathers, and as the mocassins looked very gay and pretty, she thought she would like to taste them, and she gave them a sharp dig with her great strong beak. Good gracious! you should have heard the yell that savage gave something like the noise Ralph made when he sat down in the hornet's nest by the pond yesterday; a roar exactly like that. As for the monkey, it was so frightened that it ran round to the back of

Chatty's waistcoat and tried to climb up by his braces.

Chatty himself wished with all his heart that the savage had not taken him for his master, and drew out a biscuit and began to eat it to keep his courage up. Even the eagle was scared at the scream, and the young eagles woke up with such a start that the salt tumbled off their tails, and I don't know what would have happened if the savage had not lost his balance—there was not much room for jumping about in the nest-and fallen backwards, rolling over and over again down the sides of the precipice, and knocking Chatty over too, so they both came down together, and pretty quick too. Of course, if it had not been an adventure they would both have been killed, but people never are killed in real adventures, you know, or else we shouldn't have any stories. Think of the battles and shipwrecks, and lions and tigers, people have to escape from, that they may tell little boys and girls all about them.

Well, Chatty wanted to tell about his adventures when he got home, so he could not possibly get killed in the very middle, could he? No, that would never do; so he reached the bottom quite safely, and the first words he said when he stood up, and felt in his pockets for all his things, were, "Lead on!" How brave he must have been! I am sure the savage thought so, and even the monkey.

The poor savage had not far to lead. He had nothing to do except to point with his black, trembling finger to a huge creature lying on the opposite bank of the river, and lazily flapping its great scaly tail from side to side. It opened its enormous jaws, too, every now and then, and snapped at a bird or a water-rat, or something of that sort, just as Jip snaps at a fly. I always wonder so much if Jip catches anything when he snaps. The crocodile did, and bolted it too, though it was ever so much bigger than a fly. Luckily there was a wide river between Chatty and the crocodile, or perhaps he might have

snapped him up, and then where would these adventures have been, pray?

"Let us get round to his back and attack him that way," said Chatty very bravely, though he felt rather bruised and sore from his tumble. Again the savage made signs that he wanted to eat the monkey, but Chatty put him off with some biscuit and a teeny, teeny drop of wine. So he led on, through the water, which was very cold and rough. Sometimes they swam, and sometimes they waded, but they got across quite safely, though rather damp, especially about their feet. Chatty remembered all that his mother used to say about "changing directly," and felt very sorry to think he could not obey her, but how could he possibly change his socks and boots when he hadn't any more with him? He did not catch cold, however, and felt perfectly well as he followed the savage, who was leading on as brave as a lion. They took very good care, however, to keep well behind the crocodile's tail and out of its reach, but with all their care they came once too near it, and it banged them right away into the water again. Just one flap was enough, it was such an awful tail!

The monkey now made signs that it would show them how to manage, and it climbed up a tree which grew conveniently near, dropping from a low branch right upon the crocodile's back. That was all very well for a monkey, you know, but how in the world could Chatty and the savage do such a thing? Well, they had to try, and they did it, for people do things in adventures which I am quite, quite sure they never could do out of them. Didn't I once run and stand before Mamma when I thought a red cow was going to chase us, and Mamma said it was quite an adventure. could have done that if it had not been one. I never feel certain. At all events Chatty and the savage jumped down, all right, from the very same branch as the monkey had done, and found themselves in safety on the crocodile's back.

When once they had got there they did not

quite know what to do, for it was not pleasant walking, though it was long enough to take a good many turns up and down. But Chatty did not come all that way in a big ship only to walk up and down a crocodile's back. He wanted to kill him, and immediately drew out his knife and began trying all the blades and things, one after the other on him. But oh, his skin was so tough! Chatty couldn't make a hole anywhere.

This time the monkey got them into trouble, for he went peering and peeping all about (for he had never been on a crocodile's back before, and thought it a very curious place) until he whisked his tail into the crocodile's eye. The monster gave one glance over his shoulder, and sure enough there was Master Chatty scraping away with the biggest blade at one of the bumps on his back. Chatty had not hurt him yet, nor had the savage, who was taking shelter behind one of the creature's ears, and catapulting him with stones right down into his brain. But, bless you,

whenever a pebble hit the crocodile's brain—because I believe you really can get to the brain through the ear—it did not hurt him a bit! He fancied it was only an idea—a bright idea—which had struck him. However, the crocodile thought he would be safer in the big river where no fish dare to come within a mile of him, than on shore among these strange and impudent creatures. Accordingly he waddled over the shingle (and dreadfully jolty he made it for Chatty and the savage), until he got to the stream, into which he plunged without hesitation.

Luckily the crocodile wanted to go to the mouth of the river where it flows into the sea, and Chatty had nothing to do except to sit on his back and hold tight. If the creature had gone the other way I don't know whatever Chatty would have done, for it was growing quite late and dark, and he wanted to get back to his ship. He began to feel very hungry too, and he also wanted to show his monkey to the captain. The

monkey had to hold on tight, and so had the savage, but they all three reached the mouth of the river quite safely, as the crocodile was so obliging as to swim the way they wanted to go. Chatty found his boat all ready, and waiting for He took a friendly leave of the savage, who had been really very kind to him, though he was such a dreadful coward, and he presented him with his catapult. The savage made signs that he was very much pleased, only he practised on Chatty as long as he could reach him whilst he was rowing away. Chatty did not like being hit every now and then by a big stone, but then I daresay the cats don't like it either, and yet he is always doing it to them. Perhaps, though, they may consider it an adventure, and tell other cats about it.

Chatty reached the ship in safety, monkey and all, and immediately set sail and came back. He didn't want any more adventures, he said, and I think myself those are quite enough to happen to any boy, especially in one day.

CHAPTER VI.

TO-MORROW MORNING.

Mamma took me to see Ruth Cousins yesterday. She has been ill a long time; even before the primroses came this year. How pale and thin she looked last evening; as for her hands, I am sure they are no thicker than a sheet of paper, and just as white. Yet there is nothing dreadful about her, as I always thought there must be about a person who is so very sick. Ruth says she is going to get well, though—quite well. When I asked her how she felt yesterday, she said very softly—for I haven't heard her speak loud for a long time—"I shall be well by to-morrow morning, miss, the doctor says he thinks."

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Of course I could not understand what she meant, and it seemed very foolish of Dr. Perkins to tell her such a thing, because it can't possibly be true, you know. When I said so, Ruth whispered, "True in one way, and that the best. Wait a minute, and I'll try and tell you how. You were always fond of a bit of a story, Miss." This is something like what she told me. It's her story, remember, not mine; because I'm a well little girl.

"There was once—it seems a long time ago—a little girl about as big as you, Miss Ethel. She wasn't a bit like you though, Miss, in some ways, such as clothes, and houses, and such like; but she had exactly the very same love for running about out of doors, and hunting for wild flowers, and peeping into birds' nests, and such like, as you have. Although this little girl—what shall we call her? Mary is a good name; she shall be Mary—although Mary had not such a soft bed to lie on as the young lady up at the House had, nor so

many nice things to eat; yet she used to be so hungry when it was meal-time that she thought her porridge, or her beans and bacon, or oftenest still, her crust of dry bread, the most delicious food in the whole world. As for her bed in the corner, like that one over there, the moment she lay down on it she went off sound, sound asleep, and never woke till the birds woke in the morning. So you see she was a very happy little girl, though she often would have liked to have had another bit of bread to eat, and though she knew that the moment she grew big and strong she should have to work very hard. At least that is what she thought she should have to do, but it all turned out very, very different.

"In those days Mary had a kind mother and father, and a little brother, Tom. Perhaps it isn't quite true to say that her father was kind, for he did not take much notice of the children, and now and then he behaved badly, and made Mother cry. That was not Mary's business, however, and



indeed I think she must have been too young to take much notice of family troubles. Her business was to get herself and Tom ready to go to school of a morning, and to keep her face and hands clean, and to try to prevent Tom stepping into puddles. Mary's home then was just on the edge of a big town with high chimneys, like that one over yonder, where they make all those print frocks. But there was lots of country about it, too; nice fresh open fields, where the little ones could get out for a run. There were many more fields then than there are now, for they tell me that every day the great, big, hungry city takes into its brick and mortar jaws a piece more of the meadows and lanes we used to play in.

"Mary thought, as many a child thinks, that things would be sure always to go on just the same way; that she should always see her mother standing at the porch shading her eyes, perhaps, this way, from the setting sun, and watching for her two little ones to come home from school across the fields red with the western light. But one evening—Saturday too, which used to be the pleasantest evening of the whole week—the children missed their mother from the doorway, and when they went in, half frightened already, they found the cottage full of strange people, and their mother lying on her bed upstairs tossing and tumbling and picking at the sheets, and saying over and over in an odd kind of voice: 'Tomorrow—to-morrow morning!' It was brain fever the doctor said, and there were not many tomorrow mornings for her, poor soul, before she went home—home to where I'm going, too, I humbly trust, Miss Ethel, to-morrow morning.

"At first, Mary did not miss her kind mother; no, nor grieve for her nearly so much as you'd fancy. I've often thought of that, as I lay here, why she didn't feel more sorry; and then it seems to come plain to me that it isn't a child's nature to fret, not as grown people do. Mary was quite proud of having a new black frock and black ribbons on her

bonnet, and she liked feeling that she was more independent now than when she had some one over her. She must have been just like one of those foolish young birds which we often see perched on the edge of its nest without half its feathers on, flapping its ridiculous bare pinions, and thinking it's got nothing to do but fly.

"After a bit, though, things became different. The little girl did her best, and slaved to keep the house as her mother used to keep it, but of course it couldn't be expected that she should. When the father came home of an evening some accident had generally just happened. Tom had scalded himself, or the kettle had boiled over and put the fire out, besides covering the kitchen with ashes; or else the cat had got at the milk, or a hungry dog had run in and snatched the loaf off the table. Something bad was sure to have just that minute come off, and Tom would be roaring as loud as he could, and Mary generally crying for company, or slapping him, and some neighbour

would come in and say, 'Them children do make a muddle, to be sure.'

"Perhaps it was not much wonder that when things met him like that at home, the father should have taken to staying out late at night, and smoking his pipe at the public-house round the corner. The next step was for him to be late, and lazy in getting to his work, and so, by degrees, it came about that he had not much work left to get to. One day, when poor little Mary was slopping about, trying to wash the kitchen floor, a man came in with a note-book and wrote some things down, and told her she had no call to clean up, for that it was all his, and he didn't want it cleaned. Well then, there were some very dark and dreadful days after that, which Mary cannot rightly remember about, and couldn't talk of them if she did. Tom did not go to school, nor Mary either, and there was less and less to eat every day. Father sat over the cinders in the fireplace with his head on his hands, think, think, thinking.

"One morning early he called little Mary to him and told her-ah, how distinctly she recollects every word !- that the neighbours had been very kind and had got a few pounds together for him, and that he was going out to America that very day, and would soon get work there, and make a new home for her and Tom. Poor little Mary felt quite scared and startled, but before she could say anything, or do aught but stare into her father's face, he kissed her first and Tom afterwards, and got up and went out of the house. locking the back door after him. There wasn't much in the cupboards, as you may suppose, and what little there was, Tom and she ate before night. Mary kept wondering who would come and fetch her and her brother, but nobody came. She and Tom cried themselves to sleep that night, though they were not afraid of thieves or robbers. for the house was securely fastened up, doors and windows and all. The children could not get out, possibly, nor could anyone get to them without a

great deal of trouble. Every shutter was securely nailed up, far too tightly for their little fingers to unfasten. They tore at the great clumsy bolts and bars, as famished creatures will, for before next evening they were both frightfully hungry. Still no one came. Tom cried a sort of little low whine like a lost dog, instead of bellowing out loud as he usually did.

"Mary had a dreadful thought deep down in her little mind. She has tried often and often since that time to think it was not a true one, and it has been put into her heart since then, that perhaps it might all have been a mistake; a mistake which it was very nearly too late to set right, however, for no one came near the cottage for a week, thinking it was empty. When some person brought a key and unlocked the door, they found two little children lying, as if they were asleep, in each other's arms, thin—ah, how thin they were!—but not dead. Everybody was kinder to them than weak words of mine can tell. The poor little orphans

would have found a home and a mother, and food, and care, in every house for miles and miles round. Even when they were taken to the workhouse they were as happy as children could be. Everybody was good and kind to them, from the matron downwards. They were sent to school—only a workhouse school, but a very good one for all that—and they grew up loving each other very much, and thankful to all the kind good people whom they came across in their journey through the world.

"God has seen fit to decide, Miss Ethel dear, that it should not be a very long journey, however, for either of the children. Tom went for a soldier three years ago: he was always so fond of soldiers, that child was. Well, it so chanced that young Allan, who had been a fellow-townsman of ours, and used to be always coming to see us and taking us for a holiday at Christmas, and such times, was in the same regiment as poor Tom. Allan promised me faithful he'd be good to Tom.

'I'll look after him as if he were my own brother,' he said, and so he did. But he couldn't stand between him and the Sepoy bullets, Miss Ethel, and I knew more than a year ago that one of them had killed my poor Tom. The Squire came and told me of it himself, and kind and good his words were, as he bade me remember that the noblest death a man can die is when he is taken doing his duty; and Tom had died that way, and his Queen and his country loved him, and valued the life he had given them.

"That was very kind of the Squire, but it was curious that when Allan came to see me, which he did the moment he came to England, and could leave the hospital (for he had been badly wounded, too), he said, when I asked him what were Tom's last words, 'He hadn't any last words, rightly, for he was hit sharp and sudden, poor fellow. He was talking of the fort we were going up to, through the jungle, and he was saying, "We'll be in it by to-morrow morning," when he was struck

down.' That's Gospel truth, Miss Ethel; and now my last words to you will be 'to-morrow morning.'

"Yes, dear young lady, think of what a change it will be for me! From sorrow and sickness, from weary days and nights full of pain, to the shelter of the Everlasting Arms, which I feel around me even now, and which will keep me from all harm. Ah, Miss Ethel, when you look on your last sunset on earth, may you feel as I do, that, however lovely it may all be, it is nothing compared to the beauty your new eyes will see to-morrow morning!"

That's what Ruth told me. I didn't know before that her papa had been so unkind to her: perhaps it was only carelessness, though; he may have meant to come back. Still, I am quite sure my papa would not go away and leave me and Ralph behind, like that.

It is to-morrow morning now, and Mamma went down to the cottage where Ruth has been living,

and she told me when she came back that the angels had come for Ruth and taken her dear beautiful self away, and left only the dress she used to go about in. Mamma doesn't mean her frock, I know; she must mean her body. Poor Ruth, how I shall miss her! yet how glad she seemed to be to think her to-morrow morning was so near. It is very beautiful here to-day, yet it must be more beautiful there, I suppose. I shall always beg God, when I say my prayers every night, to make me glad when my "to-morrow morning" comes.

CHAPTER VII.

A DOLL'S DILEMMA.

SYBIL did not know which to choose. Sybil was only a doll, but of course she could talk. There are plenty of dolls who can say "Papa" and "Mamma," and "Bo-peep," and little easy words like that, so I don't understand why they should not be able to say a great many other words in time, as they grow older. Babies can't manage everything at once, can they?

I suppose the real truth is that dolls never do grow old. How is it possible for them to do so when there are so many boys about? They haven't nine lives like the cats, and I am quite sure the cats would be glad of a few more lives themselves. Next to their cruelty to cats, boys are certainly

dreadfully unkind and cruel to dolls. Ralph and Oswald declare that they can't feel; but they must feel, or else Sybil could not have been in such a state of mind.

Now, I just ask, would not you be in a state of mind if you had a piece of thick string round your neck, and some one, a boy-indeed two boys-had hold of the other end of it, and was jerking you along, inquiring whether you would prefer being "chucked" (that's what they said) into the pond, or hung out of the staircase window? She could not speak much, poor thing, because the string was so tight, but she thought a good deal. First of all she wondered how her mamma (that's me) could possibly have been so very, very foolish as to leave her sitting all by herself at tea whilst she went out to spend the evening at the Rectory. Next she thought, "I'll choose the staircase window. because of my beautiful new clothes;" and last of all, she said, very softly to herself, "I wonder how those boys would like my mamma to go and cut

notches in their cricket-bat, or tear holes in their casting-nets, or break their fishing-rods into bits. Did anyone ever hear of a girl doing such things?" But poor Sybil could not even think any more, for she was being dragged downstairs by that horrid rope. Luckily, as her mamma had turned Sybil's beautiful head over her shoulder before she went away, saying, "Keep it like that, my pet, and then when I come into the room again you will look as if you were watching for me and glad to see me,"—her nose did not get very much bumped.

The best of Sybil was her obedience. Miss Kirke says she is quite an example to me, but Sibyl likes sitting still better than I do, that's very certain. She had been sitting as still as a dormouse for a long time before the boys burst in, looking straight at the door by which her mamma would come in. Although Sybil is a very pretty doll, and although her head is perfectly empty, she is not the least bit in the world vain. That's very curious, when you come to think of it, and shows

what a wonderful child she must be; for I often hear Papa say, "So-and-so is an empty-headed, vain girl." Nobody could say that of Sybil, and no one knows how empty her head is except me. To look at her you would think she was full of sense, and so she is, though she cannot protect herself from her enemies; still a great many clever and sensible people one reads of, have found it quite as difficult to do that.

I cannot imagine how anyone, even a boy, could have had the heart to disturb a doll at her tea, in that way. Sybil never tells tales, but I suspect they played a great many tricks on her before they gave her the choice of being drowned or hanged. When her mamma went away, Sybil was sitting, as I have said, like a little lady on her own chair at her own table. She had on her very best clothes, unfortunately, for as the General was having tea with her, it would never have done to disgrace her by putting on her pinafore, or even her apron. They were going to play "beggar my

neighbour" afterwards, and their own little tiny pack of cards had been left out all ready for them. when they chose to begin. No doubt they were just thinking about it when that dreadful Cousin Reginald broke into the room, for Nurse says she heard him go upstairs. I am sure neither Ralph nor Oswald would ill-treat my dolls, especially when I wasn't there. Ralphy says the General must have run away, for we found him under the table without his cocked hat, and with his sword broken in two places. That makes me think he tried to defend "his beautiful friend," as he always calls Sybil. They don't take much notice of each other before me, because I daresay it is not doll-manners to do so, but they get on very well together even when I go away and leave them in Mamma's wardrobe for weeks together. I am sure he must have struck a blow in his lady-love's defence, for his poor bald head was all squeezed in, and one of his hands broken off at the wrist. He shall have the

Victoria Cross for that, and Sybil shall give it to him herself.

But, oh dear! oh dear! what a long time it will be before she can be made fit to take tea with a General again, much less to give him a medal! She only had that one silk dress, pink with little white stripes, because it is not any use getting too many things for her at once. Girls—I mean doll-girls—do grow so fast! Now, Sybil, my poor darling, try and compose yourself, and tell me exactly how it all happened, whilst I comb and crimp your hair nicely once more. Oh, my child, my child, what have you done with your curl?

Sybil.—Reginald tore it off, little Mother, and said it was only tow. Luckily, considering the trials we dolls are modelled for, it did not hurt much, but I was afraid it would make you sorry.

Her Mother.—Sorry! I should think so, indeed! Are you aware you have also lost one of your red-heeled boots? In fact, you are not fit to be seen.

Sybil began to cry bitterly at this, for her mother spoke so severely that she felt as if her misfortunes had been her fault.

Whilst she and her mamma were bewailing themselves in this fashion, they heard a noise as if a little toy pistol had been fired down the chimney, and-pop-a beautiful golden egg, just like Mr. Cremer's Easter eggs, tassel and all, came bouncing out of the grate, hop, skip, and a jump-two jumps, indeed-like this, right into the middle of the room. There it twirled round on end like a teetotum several times, and at last stood suddenly as steady as if somebody had slipped an egg-cup under it. After a moment's silence, just to get one's breath, you know, a sweet, clear voice sounded from inside of the egg. asking very prettily if anyone would please to open it. Sybil had been staring with her great blue eyes wide open, as they usually are (unless she lies down, and then they shut of themselves), but when she heard the egg's request she shuddered. It seemed quite as dreadful to her as if one asked her to kill them. However, her mamma was delighted, and, kneeling down by the side of the lovely egg, she inquired, "How would you like to be opened, please? Shall I crack you with a spoon, or cut off your top with a knife, as Papa does?"

At this alternative the egg became so terrified that it swayed from side to side, as if it could not possibly stand upright any longer, and then cried out, in great alarm, "Not on any account! Don't do anything so dreadful! Pull the tassel very gently three times."

Sybil's mother took her daughter in her arms so as to keep her safe, in case any strange thing should occur, for she felt sure that this was a fairy egg, laid by a fairy hen (though it was enormous for an egg, you must know), and did as she was told. Once, twice, a little stronger each time;

now the third pull, and the egg-shell split into two parts, and fell open on the carpet. Such a lot of things came tumbling out of the egg, that both Sybil and her mamma felt quite stupid with astonishment, and did not know which to look at first. Naturally Sybil would have liked to pick up a little red-heeled boot which rolled towards her, but her mamma whispered, "Never take anything which does not belong to you;" so she kept her little waxen arm quite still, and only wished that Reggy had been taught that in his youth.

It was lucky for Miss Sybil that she had some one to advise her, or else there might have been a dreadful piece of work. All these lovely things which we'll come to presently, evidently belonged to the voice which had come out of the egg, and the voice belonged to a fairy—a real, proper fairy. She supported herself gracefully by the tassel, and looked at Sybil and Sybil's mamma without speaking. Oh, how beautiful she looked,

and so curiously dressed. Although she really was the tiniest little creature you ever saw, about as tall as a pencil before it has been cut, she was so stately that you felt as if she must be ever so much bigger than you, whereas she was much smaller. Not only was her face very lovely, but it was so gentle and sweet, for all her grandeur, that Sybil and her mamma felt directly that they were in the presence of a good fairy, which was a great comfort to both of them. She had bright brown hair, with threads of gold here and there in it; and large deep blue eyes, which smiled kindly at everyone.

I don't know about her nose and mouth; they must have been all right, I suppose, because I am certain she was pretty, but Sybil's mamma never could look beyond that fairy's eyes. Yet her frock was so lovely that it would have been quite enough if you had only had it to admire. It was not made like any frock we ever see here, for it came straight from Fairyland, where the very best

dressmakers in the world live. Instead of being of stupid thick silk or satin, or even velvet, it was made entirely of flowers. Think of that! Real flowers; little wee, wee daisies, each no bigger than a pin's head, but quite perfect. And they were joined together in the curiousest way. Not sewn; oh dear, no! That would have been much too clumsy for fairy milliners. Each flower had a sweet smell of its own: so they could not have been daisies exactly like ours; and their perfume held them together. I can't think how it could have been managed, but that's the way it was. Perhaps the border helped a little to make the beautiful frock stick together, for this robe had a border, which went round the sleeves and all, and also a girdle made of what looked like a piece of the blue sky, with a golden line at each edge.

Now wasn't that a lovely dress, and wouldn't I like to have one exactly like it? But perhaps I should not look so pretty in it as the fairy did, as she stood there, leaning negligently against the

thick crimson silk cord as if it were a pillar, and smiling at Sybil and her mother from beneath a light crown of flowers to match her robe. As for Sybil, she stared as if she never meant to shut her eyes, and then she tried to lift up her lace apron and play bo-peep, which was her best idea of the most delightful manners in a doll.

But Sybil's mamma knew a great deal better than to suppose bo-peep could possibly amuse such an exquisite creature as the fairy. She felt sure it was the famous Queen of Beauty, so she got up from her knees, walked slowly round the egg and its crimson tassel three times, taking great care never to turn her back for a moment. Finally she made a low curtsey, down, down, down, until she felt she should tumble backward if she went any lower. Then she rose slowly up again, brought her feet into the third position, and said timidly, "Were you pleased to want anything, your Majesty?"

"Silly little mortal child," said the fairy (what a

ridiculous idea of her to call anyone little); "I am not the Queen."

She puzzled Sybil's mamma still more by raising a golden sceptre which she held in one hand like a fan, and which had a ruby heart at its tip, with a golden crown. Sybil and her mamma both thought she must be telling stories when she pretended not to be a queen, and yet carried about a sceptre with a crown at the top. The fairy guessed their thoughts directly—for, of course, there is not a bit of good in being a fairy if you can't do that much—and added, smiling:

"That is to say, I only rule over hearts, as even you may do, little mortal girl" (she would call Sybil's mamma "little," in that ridiculous way), "when you are able to smile as I do."

And then she smiled—oh, my goodness! such a smile. Sybil's mamma felt that it would take a long, long time before she could possibly look in the least like that; besides, she did not see how she could have got the robe or wreath

or sceptre which all matched the smile so nicely. So she gave up all idea of being a fairy, or even of looking like one, on the spot, and only asked, modestly, like the way the school-children speak—

"And who might you please to be then, ma'am?"

"Only the Mistress of the Robes," answered this charming fairy, gracefully twirling her sceptre, as if *that* was nothing at all.

Fancy being Mistress of such Robes as these! Sybil's mamma rounded her eyes, so, and very nearly put her finger in her mouth, but fortunately she stopped herself just in time. Although she had always been taught not to worry people with questions, it seemed quite impossible to help asking one little one; and she whispered in her most coaxing voice, so that it should not sound rude—

"And what are you doing here, please?"
The Mistress of the Robes smiled again, and

this time her eyes sparkled like blue diamonds (I don't see why there should not be such things, though I've never heard of any). She did not look in the least angry, but replied—

"My business in this rough, rude world of yours is to repair the wardrobes of unhappy dolls who are otherwise well behaved and amiable, but who have the misfortune to fall into the clutches of monsters—boys, I mean," added the fairy, a shiver running all through her delicate frame.

"That is very kind of you, ma'am—your Grace—your Highness, I mean," said Sybil's mother, quite at her wits' ends to know what to call her beautiful visitor.

"Are you not very busy always?" she added.

"Well," said the beautiful, tiny creature, with a laugh as if some one were ringing a peal of little silver bells a long way off, "I certainly have my hands full at certain times of the year—your year I mean—for Fairyland knows neither time nor change. It is not a place at all; it is inside

people. Do you understand me, little earth-girl?"

"Not quite, ma'am."

"I must explain, then. Don't you often feel that you get tired, even of play, and are dull, and don't care to talk to anyone; and then you fly away to another sort of place, so that whilst your body is sitting quietly in this, its own world, all the rest of you is wandering among gardens and places far more beautiful than any you ever see here?" she said, disdainfully waving her sceptre around her.

"Yes, ma'am," answered Sybil's mamma, giving her child a little shake to make her attend to what the fairy was kindly explaining to them both.

"Very well; that's just what I say," continued the fairy. "Do those flowers ever fade away? Do you ever see any dead leaves on the walks there? Is there frost or snow or east wind there? Do you ever see people with colds in their head or toothache there? And, above all "—this she said in a

slow, solemn voice, which sounded rather awful—
"are there many boys there?"

"Where, ma'am?" asked the poor little girl, for she was getting quite puzzled, and felt sure Sybil could not possibly understand a word.

"There," insisted the fairy, twirling her sceptre airily round her lovely head—"there, in the only place worth living in—in FAIRYLAND, to be sure. Don't pretend you've never been there, Ethel, for I myself have met you scampering all over the place, times and times. You could find your way all about it as well as I could, I believe. Don't cry, my dear," the gracious fairy added kindly, for Ethel had put the back of her hand up to one of her eyes, and began to rub it, this way;—"don't cry; the very nicest little girls in the whole of your world go there oftenest—are always running off there, in fact."

This comforted Ethel immensely, because she thought it was as good as telling her she was nice, and though Nurse often shook her head and laughed, and bade her remember that "Praise to the face is open disgrace," still it seemed so delicious to be praised, and as good as told you were nice by a fairy, that she did not care a bit for the old proverb.

"Do boys ever go there, gracious ma'am?" inquired the pleased little girl.

The fairy tried her best to repress a shiver, and made the sweetest wry face you ever saw, as she hung her dainty head and murmured, "Sometimes; but the curious thing is, that I meet grown-up men there oftener than boys—and—and," she added, looking round, "they never come alone there. Perhaps they could not find their way about in so puzzling and dreamy a place. Some girl is nearly always leading them about by the hand, and it generally happens that the stupid big creatures have to keep their eyes fixed on their guide, or they would lose themselves directly. The consequence is, men often come to Fairyland without knowing it, or noticing the

beauties round about them. I have heard them declare they have not been near the place, when they have been taking quite a long walk there. Do you know, Ethel, I believe they are half ashamed of paying us visits."

"Boys are, I know," answered Sybil's mamma, boldly. "They declare that Sybil and I are a pair of muffs when we say we've been there, and try to tell them of all the lovely things we've seen."

"The stupid geese!" cried the fairy; "but never mind them, my dear. We must not lose any more time chattering. I am tremendously busy just now. In fact, it's—it's—" (here the fairy looked cautiously around, stood on one toe, and, raising her finger to her lips, whispered)—"it's holiday time, and a good many dolls' wardrobes are out of repair just now. So make haste and choose what you'll have, for I must be off to the Rectory, and then go on to the Hall, and to the new big red-brick house on the hill. There are boys in all those houses, you know.

Indeed, where are there not boys?" she inquired, mournfully.

All this time you will perceive Sybil had not taken any part in the conversation; it is true she had listened attentively, and that is what she does best; but now she had to choose. A pleasanter choice than between a pond and a rope, wasn't it? The fairy pointed with her wand—for the things, though only big enough to fit Sybil, were much too heavy for her to lift—to a tiny, tiny sealskin jacket, and to a little opera cloak of red merino, lined throughout with silk, and with an enchanting hood hanging at the back.

"You want something warm over your shoulders, child," she said, and no wonder; for poor dear Sybil's shoulders were not only bare and shiny, but a good deal scratched, and round her smooth pink throat there was a dreadful mark. That was from the rope, and *might* perhaps rub off with a little butter, Miss Kirke said, but it looked horrid at the time. "Which will vii.}

you have?" the smiling Mistress of the Robes inquired.

Sybil seemed puzzled, and her mamma had to whisper a great deal to her about which to choose. At last she said, speaking rather like her mamma, but much more softly and prettily, "This one, please;" and her mamma put her on the sealskin jacket, which fitted too beautifully, and in which she looked so lovely, that it was impossible to help saying, "Now, my dear, you must keep this on, and wear this hat, if our gracious fairy will permit, when you go to visit the poor General. He is in hospital just now, and his wrist is not dry yet, but he'll soon be able to take tea with you again.

"What General?" inquired the fairy, turning up her exquisite nose the least bit in the world.

If Sybil could have flown into a passion, it would have been to hear anyone, even the Mistress of the Robes, say a word against her General. Was he not dressed in a scarlet coat, with splendid gold lace all about it, and at least a dozen orders sewn on his firmly stuffed breast? He had cost I do not know how much, and wore a real sword by his side. as well as beautiful striped trousers and shiny boots. When Sybil's mamma's papa (I wonder if he could have been Sybil's grandfather? We must think about that) wanted to tease, he said the General looked something between a Christy Minstrel and a May sweep; but that was too dreadful a thing to repeat. Besides, it was only a joke. So Sybil turned round quite fiercely on the fairy-for you should always stand up for your friends—and answered, still speaking in her mamma's voice: "My General, to be sure. The bravest and wisest General in the whole world. He cost a pound, and was given to me on my birthday."

"I don't like generals," the fairy declared, not a bit frightened at Sybil's anger. "I like captains and colonels, but not generals. They are always bald. Isn't your General bald, now?"

"Yes," replied Sybil, boldly; "but that does not

matter, for he wears a cocked-up hat with a plume of scarlet feathers in it. So he may be as bald as he pleases underneath *that*, you know."

"But surely he does not always wear his cockedup hat," said the fairy, mimicking Sybil's voice.

"He can't keep it on when he takes tea with you, for instance."

"Of course he can, and does," cried Sybil: "I should not like him without it."

"What manners!" laughed the fairy. "Oh, what manners! Never mind; I'll bring you a nice china colonel, with a hat which can come off and on, and a dear little jointed captain. I also know where a sailor can be bought, only he is rather dusty; and there is a Scotchman of my acquaintance not far off, if you would not object to his being altogether knitted."

"Pooh! only fit for babies to put into their mouths," answered Sybil, rudely.

"My dear, your temper needs mending as well as your wardrobe. Keep your General,

pray, only do buy him a wig. It does not look nice for him to take tea with you in his cocked hat; and I wonder at your mamma allowing such a thing."

But whilst Sybil was fighting the General's battles, her mamma employed herself in turning over the beautiful things at the fairy's feet. There was a battledore and shuttlecock for Svbil. besides a wee, wee cup and ball. There were necklaces and lockets and rings; fans and gloves and pocket-handkerchiefs, all so tiny that Ethel felt sure the Mistress of the Robes must have made them, or at least cut them out, with her own fairy fingers. But the riding-habit! that was the wonder, after all. And out of its folds fell a natty riding-whip-lash and tassel and all, whilst the fairy pointed to a black hat and veil which had rolled a little way off. Did you ever hear of such things? Ah, I have. I saw them all the other day, and how I wished to buy them! Poor Sybil! it was lucky for her that the fairy brought them, because she might never have had them otherwise. As it was, she really did not know which to choose, and so the time passed, and the fairy began to fidget a little, and even stooped down to look at a watch about as big as a bee's knee, which lay on the ground among the other ornaments for Sybil.

"Oh, don't be in a hurry," said Sybil's mamma, remembering what *her* mamma said to visitors sometimes; "pray don't go just yet."

"My love, I would gladly stay longer," answered the fairy, gaily, "but you see these are really such busy times. The middle or end of the Christmas holidays gives me a good deal to do, I assure you."

Those were the last words the lovely aerial lady spoke, for just as they were ringing on the air the door flew suddenly open, and three great rough boys burst into the room, crying, "Ethel, Ethel, the pond'll bear!"

Sybil's mother hastily shoved her daughter be-

hind the sofa cushion, and leaned back on it, in order to pretend nobody was there. It was to be hoped the Mistress of the Robes could take care of herself, for Sybil was really quite enough to have on one's mind.

"I don't want to come out," Sybil's mamma said, coldly.

"Oh, nonsense; that's all stuff—come along!" shouted Reginald, Sybil's tormentor. "Don't sit staring at the arm-chair in that absurd way. You're as blue as skim-milk; come and have a jolly slide. Bring Sybil, and we'll punch a hole in the ice and put her in, and see what she'll look like when the frost breaks up. Do come, it'll be such fun."

"No, thank you," answered Sybil's mamma, leaning back on the cushion which concealed her child, and hoping that she was not sticking her foot or arm out of her hiding-place. Sybil did that sometimes, and always got discovered and dragged out in consequence.

"What are you staring at, Ethel?" asked Ralph, more kindly; "you look as if you had seen a ghost."

Now Ralph always spoke so kindly that his sister did not mind telling him anything, so she called him to come and sit down next her, for she dared not move on any account; and, putting her arms around his neck, whispered: "A fairy has been here—the Mistness of the Robes—and she brought Sybil a quantity of those lovely dolls' things we saw at Mr. Cremer's the other day, and we were busy trying them on, and now you've frightened her away, and she has taken all the things with her."

"That's unlucky," said Ralph, laughing; "what a pity we can't get her back again! Poor Sybil does look certainly as if she would be the better for a visit from a fairy or anyone who would patch her up."

"I suppose Ethel has seen some old pedlar go by with a basket of pins and tapes, and she immediately sets to work and thinks that's a fairy, and gives her wings and spangles, and all the rest of it. Where's Sybil?" continued this horrid rough boy; "you can't think how jolly she looked, clattering down the steps with her red-heeled boots. We made her walk for a long time, but at last the rope got twisted, and she tumbled down on her back, and shut her eyes as if she were going to sleep then and there. Oh, it was prime fun, wasn't it, Ossy?"

Oswald looked rather ashamed of himself when Ralph struck in with, "I hate boys teasing girls and their dolls. Much best leave 'em alone. We shouldn't like it done to us and our things, 'you know."

"Thank you, Ralphy dear," said Sybil's mamma, giving her kind, big brother a kiss; "I'll tell the fairy how nice you are: not a bit like a boy" (she considered this quite a compliment, though Ralph didn't), "and then perhaps she will come and sec you, and bring you beautiful presents."

But the Mistress of the Robes never came again. Sybil and her mamma often talked of her, and hoped and wished for another visit from the radiant creature; but they have watched in vain. From that day to this Sybil's mamma has never seen her again. Perhaps she heard what Reginald said, or perhaps she has been so busy that she has quite forgotten poor dear Sybil and her shabby clothes.

CHAPTER VIII.

A BELL'S STORY.

IT wasn't the dinner-bell which told me this story; nor was it the school-bell, nor the hall-door bell, nor the alarm-bell—no, not even the church-bell. It was a much bigger and curiouser bell than all those. It was a diving-bell. I saw one when I went up to London last week with Mamma and Papa, and they took me to that place where the Ghost is, and the spun-glass, and all the models. Poly—poly—I forget the name, but of course you know what I mean, Ribbon dear. I thought the diving-bell was the curiousest thing there, and wished I could go down in it. Not down into that little shallow place where

it keeps now, and which can't possibly have any beautiful things at the bottom of it, but down into the very middle of the great, wide, deep sea. That would be delightful. I asked Papa if he thought I could go; not now, but ever. only laughed, and said he was afraid little girls never went down in diving-bells; not even when they grew up. Papa was very dear and kind though, and told me a lot about divers and their dresses, and all they saw; and now we will tell ourselves a story about something which happened to a boy who went down in a diving-bell, would much rather it had happened to a girl, but if they never go, I suppose we must be content with a boy, and we'll call him "Diver;" Jack Diver shall be his name.

Well, then, Jack Diver lived with his old grandfather in a very tiny little cottage by the seashore. He was just like me in some things, for he was very fond of the sea. He loved going out in their old boat with his grandfather, who was even older than the boat, and he never felt frightened at the big waves. Indeed I believe he liked sailing over the water when it was all tumbling and tossing itself about in great hills and hollows, sometimes up and sometimes down, better than when there was no wind, and the old boat rocked slowly backwards and forwards ever so gently, and Jack could lean over the side and gaze, and gaze down into the clear water. His old grand-dad, as Jack called him, was not so fond, however, of going out in rough stormy weather. "I've had enough of that, Jack, my lad," he would say, slowly shaking his old head with its long grey hair; "I've had enough of foul weather. But I'll tell ye a strange thing about them there waves now. I've known 'em all a-foam, with the white horses racing and tearing after each other like mad; a big one catching up a little one and swallowing him. like; and all striving their very best who'd reach the shore first and curl themselves up highest, and burst with a crash and a swish on the shingle. I've known the sea like that up at the top, and down below, right down at the bottom, it would be as calm and as quiet as you please, with the weeds and things growing thick in a forest, and their long stalks swinging gently backwards and forwards, from where they were anchored tight by the roots to the bottom of the sea.

"Oh, grand-dad!" cried Jack, clasping his hands together very tight over his knees, "have you really been to the bottom of the sea?"

"Of course I have, times and times," answered the old man, for he was very pleased to find out that the little boy thought it a clever thing to have done; "I used to go reg'lar when we was working at the wreck of the *Morning Star* thretty year agone."

"How I wish I'd been as big then as I am now, grand-dad," sighed Jack.

"Your father was only just your size in those days, my lad," replied the old man, "and he used

to scream like a good one, and run away from me when I had on my diving togs. The helmet was enough to frighten any child out of its seven senses, let alone a little one. I doubt whether you'd have had more pluck than your father, Jack. I daresay you'd have yelled and bolted like the rest of 'em.

"Not I," said Jack stoutly. "I don't mean to say that I don't like to see you better as you are now, than if you had them ugly things on, but I'd never have run away from you;" and the little boy laid his brown head of touzled curls on the gentle old man's knee, and stroked his grey knitted stocking up and down. They used often to sit like that, those two, and "spin yarns," as they called it, about the good old times when the feeble grand-dad was a bold young sailor, the first in every dangerous or exciting job, and Jack's father a little boy running after him everywhere just like a dog. The old man would shake his head, and say, "And now he's

sleeping down at the bottom of that very same sea, somewheres! I don't rightly know the spot, but the Lord does, we may be sure. And I'm fain to think how calm it is down there—as quiet as any country churchyard on the green earth."

Jack was too young to remember his father, so he used, naturally enough, to try to make his old grandfather talk of other things; of the storms he had been in, and the wrecks he had seen, and oftenest of all of the strange creatures which had flitted past him whilst he was working away at the bottom of the sea, hoisting up boxes of precious things from some poor broken ship which lay helpless under the deep blue water. Jack and his grandfather liked to talk a great deal of all these past days, and at last a very curious thing happened.

It was a beautiful summer day—one of those days when everything looks lazy, and blue, and warm, and delicious. After breakfast Jack used to lead his old grand-dad out of doors to sit on the

beach in the sun and smoke a pipe, and make up their minds what was to be done that day. When I say "lead," I don't mean that the old man couldn't walk by himself. He would have been dreadfully angry if anyone had said such a thing, and he was always declaring he could do a day's work with any man of his age. But it never affronted him when Jack took care of him, and he would pretend that he could not get on without his little helper. That was only when there was nothing to be done. The moment he saw a chance of any odd job, he would seem to grow ever so much younger directly, and straighten his back and step out briskly, and answer, "Ay, ay, sir," as cheerily as any of the younger men about the beach.

On this bright morning, however, nobody seemed to want a boat or anything. Everyone looked lazy and inclined to sit still, so old Father Diver, feeling quite sure he might act being feeble and helpless as much as he liked, got his pipe and his big straw-hat, and let Jack lead him, as I have

said, along the shining wet sands to a place where a tall cliff cast the least little shade of a morning. Here they sat down, still close together, and then the old man smoked whilst Jack played about. Jack's head was as full as ever of wrecks, and storms, and diving-bells; but he knew there was no use begging for a story just then. It was much too early. I wonder why grown-up people never will tell children stories in the morning! It is of no use trying to get a story out of anyone before tea-time. Perhaps Miss Kirke might tell me something out of the "History of England" early, but that hardly counts as a story, does it?

Well, Jack felt there was not a bit of use in asking for any old-time tale at that hour; yet he did not feel inclined to sit still in the shade, and he was much too big to play with the shells and pebbles on the sea-shore, as some other children were doing, close by. Just a stone's throw from the beach, where the little waves were creeping softly up to the edge, and laying down a few bubbles

and perhaps a bit of sea-weed on the sand, and then stealing softly, softly back again, as if they had an extra fit of goodness on them, and were trying how quiet they could be—the old boat lay. She was fastened by a bit of rope to a ring in a barrel, and both the boat and the barrel (which was anchored to the bottom of the sea), moved so slowly up and down that Jack felt that if he watched them steadily for five minutes he must have gone to sleep.

But of course he did not want to go to sleep so early in the morning, and he made up his mind to ask his grandfather if he might take the boat a little way along the shore, under the cliffs, and look at the lobster-baskets. Jack meant really only to look at them, for he would not have put his hand into the strong wire cage where a lobster might be walking about, twiddling his long horns, and opening and shutting his great cruel finger and thumb—this way—for all the world. So his grandfather knew he could trust

him not to disturb the creatures, and he gave him leave, bidding him be very careful not to bump the boat against the rocks. "She's but a crazy old craft, Jack, at the best," he said, "and wants easy handling. Just paddle about where I can see you, and keep your weather-eye open for a change." I haven't an idea which was Jack's weather-eye, or whether it was bigger and brighter than the other; but whenever Papa tells me a story about sailors they always have a "weather-eye;" so, as Jack is a real sailor, though only a little one, he shall have a proper sort of eye.

Jack promised to do exactly as he was told, though he was in such a hurry to be off that he did not hear half the old man said. He rolled up his trousers as far as ever they would go, just like the little boy I saw the other day, getting into a boat; and he walked in the sea till he got to the boat, and then he scrambled in. Of course the water was very, very shallow, for the tide

was out, and indeed it was hardly deep enough to float the boat. He climbed in however, and baled a little drop of water out of the bottom with the old pannikin, and then untied the rope which fastened the boat to the barrel, and put his oars in the proper places and began to row, shouting, "All right, grand-dad! I'll keep a sharp lookout for a squall, and I won't meddle wi' the crayfish, I promise yer."

The boat was terribly heavy, and though Jack rowed with all his strength, it was as much as ever he could do to keep her straight until they got round the point close by. He would not have given in, or let the boat wobble about, for all the world whilst his grandfather was watching him; but as soon as the rocks shut him out, Jack put one oar under his knee, and drew the other into the boat altogether, and wished it was not such hard work to row.

Hot! I should think it was hot! and as for any sign of a breeze, the wind seemed to have gone fast asleep. Poor little Jack was nearly broiled. He did not care about looking in the lobster-pots any longer, nor about anything in the world, except to get cool, and have a drink of water. To reach such a thing, however, there was nothing for it but to row a little more. So after he had fanned himself with his old hat, and dabbled his hands in the sea to cool them. Jack took up his oars bravely, and rowed further on to where a little stream trickled down a cliff and dropped, like a pipe-stem made of shining glass, into the salt sea below. It was not quite such hard work getting on now, however, because as there was no one to see, Jack did not much care whether he rowed straight or not, so it did not take very long to reach the cliff and get beneath the little tiny stream.

After Jack had managed to catch as much water as he wanted in the pannikin, he looked round to see whereabouts the lobster-pots were. He found they were a long way off on the way home, and he soon made up his mind that he would rest a bit, and think about questions to ask his grandfather when story-telling time came round again. There was a delicious shade from the cliff, and as Jack sat quite still in his boat he could hear the drip, drip, drip of the water, falling from the cliff on a stone below.

No harm could possibly come to him, for there wasn't a rock anywhere very near, and the boat herself seemed as lazy and sleepy as everything else, and quite as if she too wanted to rest after having been rowed over the sea. So Jack did just what I would have done if I'd been there instead of him; he laid down at the bottom of the boat, rolled up his jacket and put it under his head, and tilted his old straw hat over his eyes. He did not shut his eyes however—oh dear no!—he was very particular to keep them wide, wide open; yet such a curious thing happened. If his eyes had been shut and he'd been asleep and dreaming, I should not have

wondered so much, but as I'm nearly sure they were open, why then it certainly was rather odd.

The drip, drip, drop: drop, drip, drip of the water seemed to say things to Jack which he did not understand at first, but presently it spoke so plain he could not help hearing it whisper over and over again—

"Down, down, down! oh, come with me Down to the depths of the sea!"

"All right," said Jack, not speaking exactly, you know, but thinking, which did just as well.

"Come in a shell,

Come in a bell,

To the place we love so well."

"All right," said Jack again, "I'd like nothing better." And as he spoke he heard the sound of an iron chain grating and turning on a wheel, up somewhere so high he could not find out where it came from without turning round, and it was much too hot to do that. Presently, besides the ugly, harsh, grating sound, he heard

bubble, bubble, pubble, quite close to him, and without disturbing himself in the least, without even moving his head, he could see some airbubbles floating on the top of the smooth water, and the least little disturbance in the shiny, glassy floor, which the boat seemed to be lying quite still upon, and right before him, with a sort of "plop," a diving-bell rose up out of the sea.

Now diving-bells are very ugly things, always, I believe; but this one was not ugly; indeed it was beautiful, being made of clear white glass, with rows of blue stones, like mamma's ring, round its rim, and in fact everywhere where they would look pretty. It was quite a little divingbell, and Jack could not see that it had anything to do with a chain anywhere; but it must have had, or how could it have been drawn up from the bottom of the sea?

Instead of a place, either, for the chain to pass through at the top, it had a sort of short handle, like that on Mamma's bell, which she keeps by her

side when she is lying down on the sofa, and this handle was shaped into a head just like Mamma's But instead of having an ugly, funny head, bell. with staring eyes, and its tongue sticking out like that, this bell-Jack's diving-bell-had a lovely little head like an angel's, for a handle. It was the head of a little girl; she seemed about as old as Jack; but as she had no body at all, only this pretty head, one could not be quite sure how old she was, or even whether she were a tall child for her age. Of course her face must have been all wet, as she had just come out of the sea, and her hair could not possibly have been tidy, but must have hung in limp locks all about her face. But she laughed merrily, and gasped a little, and said, "Oh, it's so nice!" just as I do when I have dipped my head under a big wave.

Jack thought to himself, "Come, grandfather never saw anything like this! How jolly it'll be for me to tell him stories now. I wonder if he will want to hear them as often as I do, however?"

Before he could make up his mind on this point, the little girl shook her head so as to get some of the water out of her eyes, and nose, and hair, and said, "Make haste, come along. How can vou lie broiling up here? Get into the bell this minute, you lazy boy!" She did not say it at all crossly, you know, only as if she were in a hurry to take another dip. Jack felt as if he were two Jacks; one part of him wanted to jump up and step into the bell-he could see it had a board across, and a little seat half-way up. just like the real, ugly ones—but the other half of him would not stir, would only lie there in the stupidest way, staring at the beautiful bell and its merry little head, and not saying a word or moving a finger. "How very provoking," thought poor Jack; "she will go away in a minute, and I shall lose my chance of going down in a divingbell, and I shall not be able to tell grand-dad a story after all."

But the little girl looked hard at Jack with her



beautiful bright blue eyes, and I suppose she saw how it was, that he wanted to come with her in the bell, and yet could not stir, for she just gave a little laugh—as gentle a laugh as the waves were giving—and said, "Poor dear, stupid little landboy. He can't get up, when he wants to; we must go to him, hey, bell?" The bell must have said yes, though Jack did not hear anything, for the next minute he found himself inside it, sitting on the narrow ledge—which was dreadfully slippery, by the way—and holding tight on to a rope he saw hanging down.

"How about my diving-suit?" thought Jack uneasily, for his grandfather had made him understand very clearly that it was no use thinking of going down to the bottom of the sea without a great helmet on his head with glass windows in it, and tremendous heavy boots on his feet to keep him down when he got to the bottom, and he must also have air pumped down to him all the time, just as Papa explained to me. There

were none of these things, you see, not one; and yet they were sinking down slowly through the beautiful clear water as nicely and steadily as possible. It was lovely to see the fishes dart past them, and once, when they had to pass right through a shoal of mackerel all glistening and shining in their silver suits, Jack nearly let go his rope because he wanted to clap his hands. It's lucky he didn't, though, because he would have tumbled off his glass bench, and perhaps been drowned. As it was, he only said, "Oh my!" very loud, and the little girl peeped down at him, and said, "That's nothing; I'll show you much more beautiful things than that."

By the time the diving-bell had reached the bottom of the sea, Jack had quite given up wondering why he was not drowned, or where all the rest of the little girl could possibly be, or any of the things which puzzled him so much. He was in such a hurry to get out of the divingbell the minute it stopped, that although there

was a neat little placard inside which requested "passengers to keep their seats until the train stops," he jumped out the very moment the bell touched the ground. The consequence was, he tumbled down over a whole lot of razor shells, which cut him terribly, and by the time he had picked himself up, the little girl's head had come down from the top of the bell and joined itself on to her body, which she must have left behind for convenience. He would have liked to have seen how she managed to fit her neck on so neatly, but it was altogether too late, and she was just clasping her coral necklace round her throat by the time Jack had done rubbing his knees.

It was a wonderful place, that's very certain; something like an enormous cave, only the sides and the roof were of water instead of rock, and there was nice firm sand at the bottom, in which all sorts of curious plants, and even things like trees, were growing quite happily. All the creatures who were swimming about beyond the water

walls came close to the edge and seemed pleased to see the little girl. I can't imagine how fishes show that they are pleased, for those I have seen always look so stupid and sulky, as if nothing could interest or amuse them—not even a story. These fishes contrived, however, to make Jack think they were pleased to see him and the little girl. Perhaps they wagged their tails a good deal. At all events there was no mistake about what the oysters thought, for they stood upright and clapped their shells loudly, and you could hear a sort of "hurrah" coming out of their beards—at least Jack could

All this time he didn't know the little girl's name, so he asked her. She tossed back her long hair; it was not hanging all wet about her face now, but spread out like sea-weed in the water, though they were not in the water, and said:—

"I don't know that I have any particular name down here, but if you want to call me a name, call me 'Pearl;' that's nice and short, at all events." "It's the very jolliest name I ever heard," said Jack, politely, "and you are the very jolliest little girl I ever saw."

The oysters thought this so civil that they said "Hurrah!" again; and Pearl must have been pleased too, for she began dancing about as lightly as the prawns or shrimps. She darted here, and darted there, exactly as the fishes do, and her hair floated out quite straight behind her. Jack could only stand still and stare. Pearl called to him more than once, "Oh, do come and dance!" but Jack shook his head and said nothing.

"You have not on your heavy boots, or any of your diving dress," she cried; "do, do come and twirl about on these delicious sands."

"Don't tease the boy," said a solemn old codfish, who had come to the edge of the water wall, and was flattening his nose against it as if it had been a plate-glass window; "don't tease the boy, I say. Can't you keep quiet a bit, and not flip about like that?" "No, I can't keep quiet," shouted Pearl; "and what's more, I won't. Give us a ride, old Daddy Sounds;" and so saying, the wild little creature sprang upon the back of the stately fish and began kicking him with her little bare heels. At first the old gentleman was so astonished he could only gasp, and open and shut his dull eyes, like this; but when the oysters set up a slight giggle, he got seriously angry. It was no use being angry with Miss Pearl, though, not a bit; she broke off a branch of coral which was growing near, and belaboured the old cod well.

"Fins and gills!" he shrieked, "will no one take this little wretch away? I am getting quite out of condition already;" and he plunged, nose first, right down, down to the bottom of the sea. Jack thought it best to remain where he was, as Pearl seemed well able to take care of herself, and by and by a very pretty young Plaice came simpering up to the edge of the water, and, standing upright on her tail, dropped Jack a fascinating

little curtsey. She had on a snow-white frock, and a sort of large shawl of a brownish colour thrown lightly over her shoulders, of which she was very proud, for she turned round more than once to let Jack admire it. Jack thought it very pretty with red rosettes all spotted about it.

"Where is Pearl?" asked Jack.

"I am not certain," replied the young lady, looking over her shoulder, to be quite sure she was tidy behind. "I rather think Daddy Sounds has taken her off to the Shark's larder; that's where naughty little girls go."

It was dreadful to see how little the Plaice cared what had become of Pearl, and when Jack asked in a trembling voice, "Will he eat her, do you think?" she only stared at him, and said coldly, "I'm sure I don't know. It is no concern of mine," and tried to look at the back of her shawl once more.

"Eh! eh! who talks of eating?" said a Red Mullet, sauntering up, very smart in his uniform of red and silver. "Weally now, I hope there's some fighting to be done, for we have had such a long peace."

"Peace, indeed!" cried Miss Plaice indignantly, "there is not much peace wherever children are. It is quite impossible to dress nicely, or to keep one's self tidy with Pearl kicking up the sand, and disturbing everything. The very limpets declare they have not a moment to themselves, and the sea anemones get dreadful fits of indigestion from trying to eat the things she is always poking into their stomachs."

"Ah, well, poor child! if she has been taken to the Shark's larder she won't trouble you much more," said the Red Mullet, smoothing his scales complacently. "How do you like my new epaulettes? They are a great improvement, I think."

Jack was so shocked at the way these fishes talked about Pearl, that he turned his back on them, and stretched out his arms, crying, "Oh! who will take me to my little Pearl? I want to go and help her!"

Just then he heard a grating sound on the sand, as if a boat were being drawn up on a beach, and looking round hastily, he saw a large Nautilus shell high and dry before him. The creature inside it seemed in a violent hurry, for it waved I don't know how many arms and legs all at once in every direction. I don't fancy it said anything, but Jack understood quite well that he was to jump into the boat, and set off to look for Pearl. You know people in stories are always so much more clever than people who walk about and talk really-at least, the little girls are. I never see such dear. sweet, clever little girls as I read about, so Jack Diver must also be a great deal cleverer and sharper than if he had been a real sunburnt little fisher-boy. You may be sure in that case he would merely have stood still, and stared at Pearl. and then, very likely, run away. But as he is a story-boy, he must know everything directly, so he

jumped into the boat as quickly as a shrimp would have done.

He had some idea at first of offering to help to row, but how could he, when the thing inside had oars enough to row half-a-dozen boats? They did skim fast over the water, I can tell you, and presently the Nautilus hoisted a bit of a sail. This was so much prettier than any sail Jack had ever seen, that he could not help jumping up to look, and nearly overset the boat.

"Trim," waved the creature (it spoke on its fingers like deaf and dumb people), "trim directly, or we'll heel over." Jack knew what this meant, and so do I, for Uncle Tom told me. He had nothing to do but go and sit on the other side, and then the boat came straight again.

"How's her head?" spelt out Jack on his fingers, to show he knew the way sailors talk.

"East and by east, quarter sou'," spelt the Nautilus back again.

. "Make it so," answered Jack very gravely. This



puzzled the Nautilus, and he was not sure himself whether it was quite right, but at all events the boat dashed over the sea, and the creature lay well back inside the lovely shell, and rowed, and rowed, and rowed.

At last they came to a most curious place. It was like a cave, and on the sand in front was scratched with a stick the word "Larder." The Nautilus ran the shell up on the beach in a minute, and flung out some more arms and legs, in a violent hurry, so as to steady the boat whilst Jack jumped out, which he did more carefully, thinking of the razor shells. The Nautilus made signs that it would wait to take Jack or Pearl, or both together, back again, and brandished its long arms about, as if it wanted to say, "Whatever you do, make haste."

Jack turned to go, but just then a little pertlooking fish, with a sharp nose, sauntered up to him, holding its head on one side whilst it asked him his name and business.

"Jack Diver's my name, and I want Pearl."

"Pearl is in the Shark's larder," answered the long-nosed fish, quite unconcernedly.

Now when Jack heard this he felt dreadfully inclined to cry, for he pictured his beautiful little playfellow dangling from a big hook. That was his idea of being in a larder, and he screwed his knuckles into his eyes when he thought of Pearl hanging up by her coral necklace or her shell waistband, or even perhaps by her pretty bare feet. However, Jack was an English boy, and knew better already than to stand blubbering like a baby when there was work to be done. I am sorry to say his first idea was to fight the poor fish; he took off his jacket, doubled his fists, and, shutting both eyes, rushed at the fish, calling out, "Come on, you coward! what's your name?"

"Pilot's my name," answered the little fish; "and I don't fight. The Sword-fish will be here directly, and you can hit him if you like. Excuse me, I have to go and look for my master's

dinner;" and he swam away, wagging his tail like a dog.

Jack would have liked to try to catch him, only at this moment he heard peal after peal of laughter. It sounded just like three or four little waves breaking together on a beach on a still evening, or like silver bells ringing, or anything you choose which sounds sweet and nice. No one could laugh like that except Pearl, Jack believed; and he was quite right, for presently the laughing stopped, and he heard some one call out, "Jack Diver! Jack! come here, I say: it's such fun;" and then she began to laugh again.

"Fun in a shark's larder," thought Jack; "what's her idea of fun, I wonder? Perhaps she likes hanging up to a hook. Well, I'd better go and see;" so he crept very cautiously into the cave. There he saw a large ground-shark (Uncle Tom told me all about them yesterday) lying in very shallow water on his back, with his mouth wide open. Such a mouth! Two rows of teeth, and jaws strong

enough to bite me in two! But he was not biting Pearl—not a bit of it. Pearl was standing close by, laughing and dancing about just as usual, with her pretty frock, and her coral necklace, and her blue eyes, and her hair streaming out like wet sea-weed—all exactly as Jack had seen her last.

What do you think she was laughing at, and wanting Jack to laugh at, too? The Shark catching his dinner. Not his real, big dinner, you know, for then he would like a leg or an arm of somebody; but just a small dinner, when he can't get anything else. He keeps his great wide mouth open, and silly, stupid little fishes who don't know, any better swim into his jaws, and when he has got enough, snap they go together, and a gulp, and the poor little fishes go right down his throat. I don't know what becomes of them then; Uncle Tom didn't tell me. At all events, Jack did not think it at all funny, and after he had seen the Shark gulp once, felt he had quite enough of it, so he went up to Pearl, and begged her to come away.

He told her all about the Nautilus shell, which was waiting for them, and the nice kind creature inside. But Miss Pearl did not seem to care a bit; she nodded a good-bye to the Shark, who was staring at Jack's fat legs in a very uncomfortable way, and darted out of the cave to the strip of shining sand where the Nautilus boat waited.

The moment the creature saw her, it threw out its arms and legs to steady the boat, thinking, of course, she was going to get in, but Pearl had quite another idea in that queer little head of hers. She stood still for a moment until Jack came up to her—for he really could not run so fast as she did—and then, saying in a loud voice to the Nautilus, "We don't want you to-day—go home!" took Jack's hand, asking him at the same time, "Are you ready?" Jack was puffing and blowing from his race after Pearl, so he only nodded. The little girl put her feet in the first position, Jack did the same, and then she cried, "One, two, three, away!" It was "away," indeed, for they shot

straight up through the water-world, through the forests of coral, through all the quantities and quantities of fishes, who got out of their way as quickly as possible, until they reached the waves at the top of the water.

They were not big waves, but still they curled up a little, and Pearl lay down flat on the water, crossing her arms before her, and resting her back and head against a wave, just as if she were lying on a sofa. Jack imitated her as well as he could, and the little pair floated along like a couple of sea-birds.

"Isn't this nice?" said Pearl, looking round at Jack.

"Yes, indeed," Jack said, gasping and sputtering a little, for he could not manage his wave so cleverly as Pearl did; the consequence was that every now and then his foam-pillow tumbled down upon his face, and choked him. "It's very nice indeed; but where are we going?" Jack asked this question because it seemed to be getting late,

and he was rather in a hurry to go home and tell his grandfather all the wonderful places he had been to see.

"We are going out to look at some sharppointed rocks I know of, where we may find a ship or two wrecked, perhaps," Pearl said.

"Oh, what a cruel little girl, you are!" cried Jack Diver, in great distress. "Think how dreadful it must be for the people if their ship is wrecked. That's the way I come to have only my old grand-dad, for my father was lost in a ship."

"I don't see that I am a bit more cruel than you are!" said Pearl, laughing merrily, and turning her glittering blue eyes on her companion. "Didn't you come out to look at your lobster-pots? My papa was a lobster, and he was caught in a large basket, and I daresay you ate him; yet I don't call you names, do I?"

"Good gracious!" thought Jack, "this is fearful; fancy playing with a lobster's child. What will grandfather say?"

He had not time to think any more about Pearl's parents however, for just then his feet came bump up against something, and the little girl jumped up crying, "Hurrah! here's a fine one." Sure enough, there was a mast sticking up just out of the water. Pearl flung her arms round it, and, calling to Jack to follow, slipped down the great tall thing exactly as you have seen boys slide down a greasy pole. She went quite as quick as they do, and Jack was so afraid of being left behind, that he came after her as quick as lightning. In a moment they were down at the bottom of the sea again. It was not very deep in that place, but deep enough to have drowned all the people who had been in the ship long, long ago.

Pearl was a little bit frightened, I think, though she would not acknowledge it for the world, because she took Jack's hand and held it tight. The two children walked all about the curious old ship, keeping close together. It was such a funny old thing! built ages and ages ago, exactly like those pictures in my history book. It had a high, high rail all round it, and was what Uncle Tom calls a "tub;" that is, a clumsy ship. But the people on board wore frills round their necks, and rosettes on their shoes! not a bit like our sailors. They were all dead, of course, and yet they did not look dead. They were sitting, and standing, and walking about, and Jack was thinking seriously of speaking to them, when bump, they came against something else. This time the bump knocked Jack down, and he let go Pearl's hand and cried "Oh!"

Where do you think he was? Not at the bottom of the sea at all, but lying flat in his own boat. A fresh breeze had sprung up, and driven Jack bang against a rock. He jumped up and seized the boat-hook to keep her off, for he remembered what his grandfather had said about the boat being so crazy. He was a handy little fellow, and very soon turned the boat round into a safe place. The moment it was all right

he thought of Pearl, and called her over and over again. But no Pearl answered, and Jack felt so dreadfully hungry he did not know what to do. He began to row round the point and home again, as quick as ever he could, and as he rowed he remembered that Pearl had never offered him anything to eat. "Perhaps she meant to have got me some lunch out of the Shark's larder," he thought, "only I did not feel hungry then, and if anyone had said a word about lunch, the Shark might have liked some too, and I don't know how that would have been," continued Jack, rubbing his legs pensively. "Never mind, I have a stunning yarn to tell grand-dad."

When Jack reached his own home again, his old grandfather said, "Where hast thou been, lad? If it hadn't been such a still day, I'd have fidgeted after thee."

"Let's get summat to eat first, and then I'll tell you such a yarn, grand-dad," cried Jack. And so he did; he told the old man all about it,

beginning with the diving-bell and ending with the wreck. When he came to Pearl the boy could hardly think of any words pretty enough to describe his playfellow. But the old man shook his head, and said, "Idle dreams, lad; idle dreams. I can't have thee playing with mermaids and sharks, even in thy sleep."

"Sleep, grand-dad!" cried Jack indignantly, "I never shut my eyes once. I heard the drip, drip of the water all the time, as plain as plain, and the boat was rocking like anything."

"Well, and don't thee see that was what sent thee off to sleep, silly lad? Thee'st been snoring asleep all the morning. What about the lobsterpots?"

"I never went near 'em!" cried Jack; "and wot's more, I won't, ever again. Pearl says it is cruel, and so I won't do it at all."

"Thee hast been asleep to some purpose," said the old man, getting up very quietly and going across the room to fetch a certain old strap with which he sometimes corrected Jack. "This Pearl seems to have taught thee bad manners. Come here, and learn better."

"No, no," cried Jack, getting near the door.

"If you hit me I won't tell you a word about the Shark's larder."

But the old man did not seem to mind this threat at all, and the end of it was that Jack had to keep his wonderful yarns to himself, for his grandfather used to doze until the boy came to any of Miss Pearl's speeches, and then the old man would get up and go for his strap and say, "That was not pretty of the little miss. I must leather that teaching out of thee, my lad."

It was very provoking, was it not? and sometimes Jack wished he had never gone down to the bottom of the sea with Pearl at all.

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